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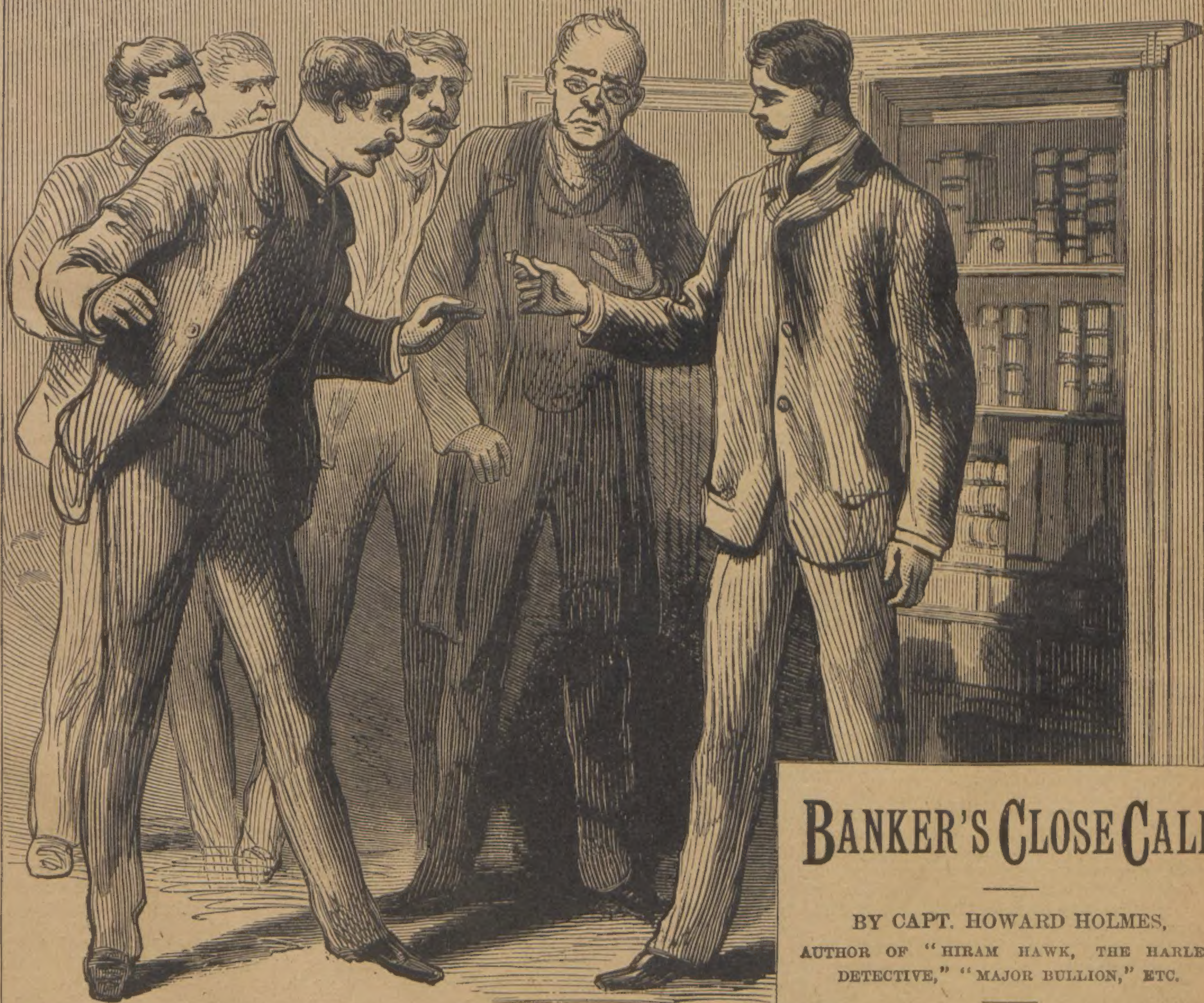
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THE CROOK-CASHIER



OR

THE WALL STREET

BANKER'S CLOSE CALL

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "HIRAM HAWK, THE HARLEM
DETECTIVE," "MAJOR BULLION," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ROBBED OF—WHAT?

THE Goldstone Bank in Wall Street was in a state of high excitement.

It was just half-past nine in the morning and the president of the institution, Mr. Sergius Shanks, had just come down.

Mr. Shanks was an elderly man who had

THE DETECTIVE HELD OUT, TO THE ASTONISHED GROUP, A HUMAN FINGER.

taken unto himself, which he had a perfect right to do, a young wife. He had been married just a year to this, his second, partner in the matrimonial business, and was rather proud of her.

One of the employees of the Goldstone had discovered that the safe had been tampered with some time since the closing of the bank at the usual hour on Saturday, and the others were anxiously waiting for Mr. Shanks.

The president, a little pale from some unknown cause, walked into his private office after nodding pleasantly to his men, and shut the door.

He was followed into the room by his cashier, Cadmus Cook, a man just forty, good looking, and an all-round athlete.

"Anything new, Mr. Cook?" asked the president. "You must have been sick last night, for you look a trifle pale about the gills."

The cashier attempted a sickly smile, which instantly vanished, and then he spoke in lowered tones.

"We have been waiting for you," said he. "We didn't care to send after you, as we knew you would be down in a short time."

"What's the matter?"

"A good deal, I fear. We believe that the safe has been robbed."

"Which one?"

"The little one, sir."

"Let me see. What have you done?"

"We tried a little to open it, but the inner works have been tampered with to such an extent that all our efforts to open the doors have proved failures."

"Who made the discovery, Mr. Cook?"

"Bullock was the first one to do so, I believe. He was attracted to the spot by a few drops of blood on the floor."

Mr. Shanks seemed to lose color, but he soon moved toward the door of the private office, where he stopped, looking back at the cashier.

"Have you sent after the police?" he asked.

"Not yet; though Mr. Stafford thought best to do so at once."

"I am glad you did not. I will see what is needed, and after that we will take the proper steps."

The two men moved out into the banking room, where several anxious-faced men, tellers and others, awaited them.

All approached the safe, with Mr. Shanks in the lead.

The old gentleman might have been sixty. He was a man of much wealth, and was accounted a shrewd money shark in Wall Street.

He turned and addressed a young man named Stafford, who was the teller.

"Looks like we've been pinched, eh, Mr. Stafford?"

"Indeed it does. I have seen plundered safes before, and this one shows that we have been robbed, if I'm a judge."

An attempt was made to open the safe, which was set in a wall of masonry, but the workers had nothing but their trouble for their pains.

"Send for a lock-picker. There's one just around the corner, I believe."

"Jack Orson?"

"I don't know his name."

"Oh," said Cook, "he's the same man who opened the Burlington safe after the half million dollar robbery."

"He'll do."

While one of the men went to summon the lock-picker, Sergius Shanks dropped into a cane-bottomed chair and mopped his face. He was perspiring and was ill at ease. There was cause for this, for he knew what had been in the safe and had a right to be excited.

"We ought to have an officer here," suggested Stafford.

The president seemed to rouse himself.

"Perhaps that would be the proper thing. You can send for one."

"For a detective, also?"

"Why, yes. If our bank has been robbed the fact will sooner or later become public property, and we must have some one on the trail of the villains."

Cadmus Cook stepped to the bank telephone and called up the Mulberry Street Station.

By the time he had informed Mr. Shanks

that an officer would be immediately despatched to the bank, a young man dressed in mechanic's clothes came in and announced that the was Jack Orson, a lock-picker.

"Wait until the officer comes," said Shanks.

"How long will that be? I have an engagement further down the street, and I would like to get through here as soon as possible. I might see what I can do, and—"

The banker nodded, and Jack went to work at once.

His nimble fingers told that he was an expert, and he quickly discovered that he did not have a very hard job on hand, for at the end of twenty minutes he rose and waved his hand toward the safe.

"She'll open all O. K. now," asserted Jack. "You can open the door, or let the officer do it when he comes."

The locksmith picked up his tools, rolled them in a clean cloth, pocketed the bill which Sergius Shanks handed him, and in another moment was on the sidewalk.

He met a man at the door, and guessed that it was the detective who had been sent for.

This person walked straight to the spot where the bank people were congregated, and singling out Mr. Shanks, said that his name was Trailer, and that he was the detective sent down by the inspector.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Trailer," replied Shanks. "I fear we have a bit of work for you. We believe we have been robbed, but when and by whom is the question. The safe there is ready to open, so the locksmith said, and you can now open the door."

Tracy Trailer, who had taken off his hat, showing a high forehead and a pair of keen dark eyes, went up to the closed steel door and examined it from the outside for a minute.

No marks of violence were apparent; then he took hold of the shiny knob, gave it a slow twist, pulled back, but the door did not yield.

"The man said it would open before he went off," and Mr. Shanks gave a slight start as he spoke.

"Maybe it will, after a while. Ah, it's coming now. It must have been sticking somewhere, you see."

As the door was pulled open, those behind the detective crowded forward, anxiety and eagerness depicted on each face.

"There seems to be a little blood here. Maybe the locksmith shed it."

"I—I really don't know," stammered the excited banker.

"Why, what's this?" and the detective stooped and picked up something that lay within the safe on the narrow coping beyond the steel door.

"'Pon my word, it's a human finger!" cried Stafford.

"A—a what?"

"A man's finger. Look! It seems to have been torn off by the sharp edge of the door when it was swung back after the robbery. It doesn't bleed any more, eh, Mr. Officer?"

Trailer shook his head. He was holding out to the astonished group a human finger which had been wrenched off at the knuckle joint.

It was a white finger, almost bloodless and smooth. A plain gold ring encircled it, and here and there on the metal were little drops of gore.

President Shanks was looking through his gold-rimmed spectacles at the ghastly thing, and he shivered visibly.

Cadmus Cook uttered an exclamation of horror at sight of the severed finger, and his eyes seemed to start from his head.

"Look at the interior of the safe, Mr. Trailer," suggested the banker. "The finger may be a certain clew for you, but put me out of this terrible suspense by letting me know what has been carried off."

Tracy Trailer stepped aside.

"As you must be familiar with the deposits of the safe, you seem to be the proper person to investigate," he said to the banker, who nodded and came forward.

The finger was still retained by the detective, and all saw their president kneel before the safe.

The old man seized the button of one of the several little metal drawers inside and pulled it open.

"The bonds are all right," he announced. "Then it may not be so bad after all," assumed the cashier.

The banker took from his pocket a little key, which he inserted into a lock, after which he opened another drawer.

"His private deposits," whispered Stafford to the detective.

"Jewels, Mr. Stafford?"

"Can't say. None of us have had access to that particular drawer. What is in there is his own secret."

Sergius Shanks was looking into the drawer with a stare. Every particle of color had deserted his face, and it was almost ghastly in the morning light. His hands trembled, and his lips seemed to grow ashen.

All at once the old man shut the little drawer and turned the key nervously.

All knew that it had been plundered.

He reeled toward the chair, and Stafford, who was nearest to it, helped him to sit down.

"They're gone!" cried the old man. "They've vanished, and I am ready to die!"

The assembled men looked at one another, and Cadmus Cook broke the silence.

"You may have seen them last elsewhere," said he.

"No, no! They were in that drawer—they were there Saturday night, for I saw them, had them in my hands!"

"Bonds, Mr. Shanks?"

"No, no! Do you think I'd have come down here during that thunderstorm just to look at a lot of bonds? The deuce, no. I am ruined! I am ready to go! The old enemy has struck! Take me home to Winnie!"

One of the men ran out to call a cab, and Detective Trailer went over to the banker.

"Oh, you can't find them," cried the old man, trembling. "You might as well look for a needle dropped into the deep sea. They're gone, and I shall soon follow. I am in the snare now. I am the victim of the accursed shadow. I am already a marked man—just as good as dead!"

Sergius Shanks fell forward and buried his white face in his scrawny hands.

"Do you know what he has lost?" whispered Tracy Trailer to the cashier.

Cadmus Cook vehemently shook his head.

"That was his secret," said he.

The cab being ready, the weakened banker was assisted to the vehicle, and as it drove off the detective brushed against the teller.

"I would like to see you at No. —, Grand, near Broadway, Mr. Stafford, as soon as you can come," and, wrapping up the severed finger to serve as a clew, he walked away, saying good-morning to the employees of the Goldstone Bank.

CHAPTER II.

NIPSIE ATOM'S SHADOW DANCE.

Detective Trailer had selected Stafford as being the one who would be most likely to tell him a good deal about Sergius Shanks and his bank, and when he left the institution he went home to his little rooms near Broadway, to wait there for the teller.

The day waned, but Harley Stafford did not put in an appearance, so the ferret concluded that the teller would not be able to get away until after closing hours, and after this he went out again.

Remembering that he had a somewhat strange errand in Canal Street, he donned his hat and to Canal Street he bent his steps.

A few minutes later he entered a bird store and was in the midst of bird talk and all sorts of chatter.

It was a dirty place, quite dark, and cages were piled on top of each other in the direst confusion.

Here were thrushes, linnets, skylarks, canaries and other song birds in confusion, and the detective smiled as he made his way down the darkened aisles, with the caged birds chirruping at him all the way.

He was addressed by a portly, but poorly-dressed woman, with a very red face.

She wanted to know if the gentleman didn't want a fine bird, and began praising her stock in trade, pointing out the good quality of her Hartz canaries and ending up with an eulogy on a fifty-dollar skylark, which, she said, could whistle three distinct tunes.

The bird-fancier had a foreign brogue, and her features indicated that she was Italian, while the dirty little chap who tugged at her skirts looked very much like a little Russian.

Trailer said that he wanted a canary for a little friend of his who seldom got out to hear the birds in the park, and after some dickering he selected a Hartz warbler and paid for it.

"You seem to have a good trade," observed the ferret, as he waited for the bird.

"Vella good! vella good!" was the reply.

Just then a back door opened and a tall, thin man made his appearance, but the moment he caught sight of the detective he dodged.

The woman called to him to come forward, as she wanted some change for a bill, and he slouched in like a guilty wretch.

His eyes met the Detective's glance the moment he advanced and Tracy Trailer smiled.

"How are you, Stacy?" he saluted.

The man almost dropped the bag of coin on the counter, and the next moment was staring at Trailer. They had met before and very likely at a time and place not very complimentary to Stacy's character.

"I didn't know you were in the bird business," said Trailer.

"There! Don't give me away. For God's sake give me another chance. I'll tell you all about it."

"I thought you knew something," replied the detective, not letting on that he did not understand what the scared man was driving at.

"He was here the other night. This is Monday. Well, it was late Saturday night when he called." Here Stacy glanced at the woman, who did not appear to be listening. "You see, I didn't expect him and he frightened me nearly out of my wits. He had changed a good deal and when he threw three fifty-dollar bills on the table in the little back room I knew that he was in luck."

"Of course, Stacy," assured Trailer, drawing the man on. "Those bills were proof of it."

"Yes, yes. He said he had a job on hand, one that would net him all the money he cared about. That was him all over. But his face was so white and ghastly. It gave me the shivers. He went away just before the storm broke, saying that it was going to be a boss time to plunder the Wall street nest."

"You haven't seen him since, eh, Stacy?"

"No, but here's your singer. You aren't going to keep a bird, are you?"

"Maybe so. Can you come to my room to-night, say, at nine, Stacy?"

"If the Centipede will let me off."

"Who's the Centipede?"

"That woman yonder. You never saw her like. She knows more about matters and things that are dark than any other female in New York. I call her Mother Centipede when I want to name her right. I will come if I can."

"Do."

Taking his bird, Detective Trailer walked from the bird store and increased his gait.

Half an hour later, after running up three flights of stairs, he knocked at a door and was at once invited to "Come in!"

Trailer walked forward and stood in a small room with a dingy ceiling and not over-clean side-walls.

It was a room with an interesting tenant, a little girl of fourteen, with wonderfully bright eyes and a mass of golden hair which reflected the last beams of the afternoon sun.

Her face was somewhat pinched as if by pain and care, and it did not take much to see that she was a "shut-in,"

who could only look down over the rooftops into the park which lay in all its natural loveliness in the heart of the great city.

"Where's my bird?" called out the little girl. "You weren't to come again without it."

Trailer took the cage from underneath his coat and began to unwrap it.

"Why, you're an angel, Tracy," cried the little one. "I'm going to kiss you for this present."

With a laugh she threw her little body forward and the detective good-naturedly bent down and let her cover his forehead with kisses.

"Oh!" suddenly cried the girl. "I've been waiting for you to tell you something startling."

Her face was all soberness now, and her voice told that she had something of importance to communicate.

"Go and look out that window," continued the shut-in, whose name was Nipsie Atom.

The detective obeyed, and saw right ahead, separated from the house by a narrow space, another house of almost equal shape and height. There was a window directly opposite the one where he stood, but it was shaded with a drab curtain.

"What do you see, Tracy?" asked the child.

"The house across the alley and over yonder the trees in the park."

"Is the curtain down yet?"

"It is, Nipsie."

"Just like it was Saturday night. It was then that I saw the shadow dance on that curtain."

"How came you to see it? Come, tell me, Nipsie."

"I had moved my chair to the window, for I thought Bantam would drop in. It must have been past eleven, for I had heard a clock strike—not very distinctly, on account of the storm."

"Well, all at once I seemed to see two men wrestling over there in that room. They swayed back and forth between the light and the curtain, just like men trying to get the better of each other."

"I could not help watching them, for there was something about the scene that excited me. At last they ceased to wrestle and but one shadow was on the curtain. At one stage of the fight—for that's what it seemed to be—one of the men seemed to have the other by the throat."

"By and by I saw but a single shadow on the curtain. I saw a hand reach out in a certain direction, and the next moment all was dark over there. That hand seemed to put out the light."

"It doubtless did, Nipsie."

"Why, of course. It all seemed so terribly real that I almost fainted in the chair, and if Bantam had not come in I might have done so."

Detective Trailer turned and looked across the narrow way.

"Was there a light in the window last night?" he asked.

"Nothing of the kind."

"You watched it, did you, Nipsie?"

"Didn't I, though? I'm interested in that window. I don't know what I would give if I hadn't seen that shadow dance, and then, on the other hand, I would just like to know what it all meant."

Little Miss Atom was silent for a moment.

"What is more, Tracy, the curtain hasn't been up since. I've taken many a peep at it since the fight and it hasn't moved."

The New York detective had made up his mind to investigate. He wanted to look beyond the door of the suspected room, and, bidding the girl make herself at home with the canary, he left the room.

He passed from the house and entered its neighbor.

It was a tenement bee-hive, like many on that particular street, and the stairs and hallways were dark and creaky.

Detective Trailer made his way toward the top of the old human shell and reached the proper landing.

As yet he had met with no one, but all at once he was called to in a shrill tone.

A weazen-faced female had poked her head out of a door and was looking at him in the way of a challenge.

"You won't find Number Six at home, sir," she screeched. "He's not been in since Saturday night, when he went down stairs, for I see'd 'im with my own eyes."

"Number Six, is he? What's his other name?"

"He hasn't any other. It's Number Six in the direct'ry, I guess, for it's Number Six in this nest."

Detective Trailer kept on toward the closed door which he had already singled out.

"Go ahead ef ye can't bel'ave an honest woman," shouted the maddened vixen at the door. "I 'ope Number Six, if you do find 'im in, will take yer napper."

Trailer was already at the door and had turned the knob. The portal did not yield.

He tried again and found for certain that the door was locked, probably from the inside, and then he looked up at the tramson. It had a discolored paper over it, but there was a long, straggling tear in it, and this was sufficient.

Tracy Trailer caught hold of the cross-piece over the door and drew his body round. One look was quite enough.

He instantly lowered himself and threw his body against the door, which went in with a crash.

The man of trails found himself in the middle of an eight-by-ten room, and at his feet, bent half double on the carpetless floor, lay a man.

Long before life had fled.

The face of the corpse was dark and terribly distorted.

There were signs of a struggle about the room. The chairs had been kicked over and were broken, and a table on three legs leaned up against the dirty wall.

Detective Trailer stooped over the dead man.

The foul odors in the room were almost overpowering, but the shadow-sharp held out against them.

He raised the curtain and looked for a moment across the alley at Nipsie's window, but the girl, being busy with the bird, he did not see her.

He made out that the dead man was young. The frame was well knit, and its owner must have been strong and agile. The bloated lips were partly hidden by a dark mustache which at one time had been accorded a good deal of care, and the man's clothes were genteel.

But these were not the things that most attracted the detective.

He lifted the right hand, which had been doubled up under the body, and then he made a discovery that actually startled him.

One of the fingers was missing! It had been torn off at the knuckle joint.

Had he found the burglar of the Goldstone Bank?

CHAPTER III.

DETECTIVE AND TELLER.

Besides prying into the identity of the dead man, Detective Trailer had two important engagements.

He had asked Harley Stafford, of the Goldstone Bank, to his rooms, and he had made an engagement with the man in the bird-store to meet him at the same place at nine that night.

Both of these engagements should be kept, and yet he wanted to look after the dead man with the missing finger.

The Gotham detective looked about the room a little. As we have said, a struggle had evidently taken place. This was shown by the discoveries he had already made and by the shadow dance witnessed by the child in the other house on Saturday night.

There was nothing in the room to give Tracy Trailer the slightest clew to the man. There was not so much as a scrap of paper, and no marks on the dead man's clothing.

It was a puzzle which threatened to grow harder and harder as the days wore on.

The bruised condition of the stump on the hand told that the finger had first been crushed in something and then actually pulled off. Detective Traller had seen one similar case before, and, strange to say, a safe door had been responsible for the mutilation.

When he had seen all there was to see in the little room, he thought of Nipsie Atom, and went back to the other house.

He told his little friend everything, and saw that, while her face grew pale with horror, she stood the dread narration very well, and she promised him to keep an eye on the opposite window in hopes that something would turn up.

After this, but not until he had sent word of the murder to the nearest police station, did Traller turn homeward.

It was now late in the afternoon, and he had hopes of finding Stafford at his lodgings.

For once, at least, the detective was not disappointed, for in the little parlor to the right of the hall, sat a young man waiting for him.

It was Harley Stafford, teller in the Goldstone Bank.

"Been here long, Mr. Stafford?" asked Traller, as he shut the door.

"About an hour, I should judge. I took the liberty of smoking, but your landlady came in to say that the invalid up-stairs objected to tobacco, and I had to let up."

"The invalid? Ah, yes; you should see him, Mr. Stafford. Perhaps you may one of these days. He doesn't like tobacco, but he never objects to my smoking."

The young teller looked surprised, but did not say anything.

Detective Traller led the way to his own lodgings, which were on the second floor, front, and the two took chairs.

"That robbery was a remarkable occurrence," said Traller.

"Nothing like it in my career, but then I haven't seen very much of life, you see. I've been with these Goldstone people ever since I was old enough to be messenger boy."

"You ought to know the bank force pretty well, Mr. Stafford."

"I do, as well as any one can; know them all. I never had a very good chance to know much of two of them—Mr. Shanks and the cashier, Mr. Cook."

"What do you know about the latter?" Harley Stafford started a little, and his face seemed to lose a mite of color.

"I would rather you would not quiz me on that subject, Mr. Traller. Fact is, I am a close friend of Cook's sister."

"Oh, I see. There's already a woman in the case, eh?"

"To some extent, but not connected with the robbery or the dead finger."

"No; of course not. The cashier enjoys the confidence of the bank people, eh?"

"Entirely so."

"And his family—"

"He has no family," broke in Stafford.

"He lives with his sister, Miss Nina."

"In what part of the city, Mr. Stafford?"

"On Madison Avenue, about two squares above Mr. Shanks'."

"They keep house, do they?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long has Cook been with the Goldstone?"

"Three years."

"Trusted, then. A faithful servant."

"Just so. There is no one in the world whom I would sooner trust than Mr. Cook, the cashier."

"I'm glad to hear that. You recommend him without reserve, and you have had an opportunity to study him pretty thoroughly."

"And always to his credit."

Again Harley Stafford turned a little pale, and he seemed to speak the last words with an effort, but the detective did not appear to notice this.

"Mr. Stafford, have you any idea what was taken from the steel drawer in the safe?" suddenly put the ferret, looking the young teller in the eye.

"That was the president's secret."

"But you bank employees must have had an idea what he was guarding so closely. It was not money."

"It could not have been, from what he said when he discovered his loss."

"Could it have been jewels?"

"I—don't—know," said the teller, slowly.

"I never heard of the president having any jewels."

"But his wife may have owned some."

"Beg pardon, but Mrs. Shanks is not that sort of woman to trust her jewels in a bank safe. She would want them nearer her than twenty squares."

"She is young, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. Thirty years her husband's junior."

"Where did he get her, Mr. Stafford?"

"In this city. I never knew her before their marriage, and have seen her but twice since."

Again that reserve and trembling came over the young teller, but, as before, the detective did not seem to note it, though it could not have escaped his keen eye.

"Who locked the safe Saturday?"

"I did myself. It came my turn, and it is customary, after a custom with the Goldstone Bank, for the person who locks the safes Saturdays to tell no one the combination which he uses."

"You told no one, of course?"

"I did not. This only deepens the mystery. I am quite sure that the bleeding finger was not in the safe when I locked it."

"You remember the storm of that night?"

"Very well. I was out in some of it."

"You recall hearing the president of the bank saying that he saw the missing articles in the safe that night?"

"Heavens! he did say something about that. But he must have been mistaken."

"Of course, if you locked the safe—the little one—and told no one how."

"I told no one," said Stafford, flushing a little. "That would have been betraying my employers."

"Just so. Sergius Shanks said he saw the missing articles that night. And in the safe at that."

The teller sat silent, and painfully depressed, in the presence of the shadow.

The shades of evening were falling outside, and his gaze wandered to the window as if he wanted release. But he was in the hands of the clew sifter, and it would not do to take leave hastily.

"What is your theory of the finger, Mr. Stafford?"

"I believe it belonged to the person who plundered the safe, and that somehow or other it was caught between the door and its frame, to be wrenched off by the robber."

"That's a pretty good theory. It would take a man of nerve to wrench off his finger."

"More nerve than I have," answered the teller, with a smile, as he looked away again.

"Now, what if I should tell you that I have found the man with the missing finger?"

"It would be marvelous, but not astonishing to me, who have read so much about the exploits of you detectives. Do you tell me that you have found this man?"

"I will let you answer that question for yourself."

"But how can I?"

"By coming with me."

Stafford rose and put on his hat.

"I am willing to do anything I can toward solving this mystery," he said. "I will go with you anywhere."

He was very calm now. His trepidation had departed, and his nerves seemed of iron.

Traller glanced at his watch as they left the house.

"You have been very frank, Mr. Stafford," he remarked, looking at the young man. "I am going to say that murder has followed the robbery."

"Murder? You don't tell me this."

"One crime has been supplemented by another, and a greater one. These two crimes—the robbery and the murder—belong together, and there is a cord which connects them."

"It is terrible! I trust we may all come out of it guiltless."

These were strange words, and from under his brows the shrewd detective glanced swiftly at the speaker.

They were walking side by side through

the gathering shadows and with their faces turned toward the river.

By and by they took a car, where they were not recognized, and at last the detective and his companion alighted at a corner.

Stafford looked around him with a slight start. He seemed to know where he was.

"I do believe you are taking me to a place of which I have heard a great deal, Mr. Traller," he said.

"Perhaps. I am taking you to a place to which many a poor wretch finally comes."

"The Morgue. Yes, you are right. I have never been beyond its threshold."

The detective led his friend beyond the doors, and they stood for a few seconds in the office of the morgue keeper.

There was very little color in Stafford's face now, and his hands were shut at his sides.

"This way, Mr. Stafford. You see, I am somewhat familiar with this charnel house. Our man awaits us in the next room."

Another door was opened, and in a grisly chamber, where they heard the sound of dripping water, they paused. A dim light was turned on, and the detective, with a look, walked across the flagging and stopped in front of a long glass-case.

The light grew a little brighter, until it revealed the ghastly object beyond them.

"This is the owner of the missing finger," said Traller, pointing forward. "You can go a little closer, Mr. Stafford. I want to know if you recognize him."

The teller of the Goldstone Bank stepped forward with assumed lightness, and looked at the distorted face as it crowded itself upon his vision.

"No, no! Impossible!" pealed suddenly from his throat. "That man never robbed the bank."

"But look at the right hand!"

Stafford leaned a little closer, and then sank insensible to the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STARTLED TELLER.

When Stafford, teller of the Goldstone Bank, came out of his faint he was surprised to find himself hemmed in by the four walls of his own chamber.

He looked around bewildered, for he could not tell how he had come home, for he had no recollection of the journey. He remembered the trip to the Morgue, the weird lights there, the drip, drip of water on the dead, and the man with the missing finger.

He also felt that he had fainted there, fainted in the presence of the detective in front of the glass-case where the dead lay on their slabs of stone, but beyond this nothing.

Yet he was at home again, and the hour was late.

Who had fetched him back?—the detective?

But, first of all, he got up and examined his room.

The door was locked and the key lay on the floor, which told him that it had been taken from the lock on the inside, and, after securing him a prisoner in his own room, it had been tossed back over the transom for his own use.

"In the name of Heaven how came I back here?" he asked himself again and again. "I can't imagine how I got back, but this is my old nest, and I'm all alone in it."

Then he recalled anew the look at the dead man, and saw the distorted face, and, most of all, the mutilated hand.

"I must have recognized him, for why did I faint there?" he said. "Detective Traller could tell me what I did, and he shall. I will see him. I know where he rooms, and he must have fetched me back here."

Just then he heard a footstep in the hall beyond the door, and in a moment he had the portal open, and was looking out.

A tall, fair-faced girl smiled when she saw him.

"You are better, now, I hope, Mr. Stafford," said she, sympathetically.

"I feel that way, Lucy. You saw me come home, did you?"

"I couldn't help it, you see. Why, I

even helped to lock you in your room. You found the key, did you? That's good."

"But who fetched me back?"

"The gentleman who helped you up stairs, I suppose."

"Tracy Trailer?"

"Really, now, Mr. Stafford, I didn't ask him who he was. He seemed to be a nice gentleman, and he said that you had met with a slight accident, and I believed him."

"In other words, Lucy, you thought I had taken too much wine somewhere, now didn't you?"

The maid flushed, and turned her face away.

"It was not wine, Lucy," continued Stafford. "But I must confess that a little would do me some good just now."

"You look like it; indeed you do."

"But the gentleman who helped me up stairs. What was he like, Lucy?"

"He was a tall gentleman, and wore a darkish mustache, which clung close to his lips."

"The detective! I thought so!" exclaimed Stafford.

The maid started a little.

"Was he a detective?" she queried, bending forward with curiosity. "I never saw one of those men before. Are they all like that one, handsome and clever?"

"I—I don't know. I can't speak for all of them, you see. No one has been to my door since I came back?"

"I don't know about that, Mr. Stafford. I heard some one in the hall half an hour ago, and when I came to see who it was the front door shut and some one passed out into the street."

"A man?"

"I got the merest glimpse of him, but from the step both in the hall and on the pavement, I would say that a man let himself out."

Stafford said nothing in reply, but the girl saw that he was mystified and perplexed.

"By the way, Mr. Stafford, I forgot to give you the cuff button which I found in your room near the bed yesterday morning when I swept."

Stafford held out his hand.

"I intended to place it on your dressing-stand at the time, but dropped it into my pocket, and never thought of it till after you came home with the gentleman."

One of the girl's hands was placed into her dress pocket, and when it came out it extended something toward the young teller.

He took it rather abstractedly, but all at once his eyes filled with a strange light.

He was holding a plain gold cuff-button, the shank of which was broken. He could see how it could have been lost in its present condition, and, as he bent toward the light, he examined it closely.

"You didn't find this in my room, I hope, Lucy?"

"Indeed I did, Mr. Stafford. I found it near your bed, as I was saying, yesterday morning."

"Yesterday was Sunday, you know."

"That's right, and you had gone out for your breakfast. It lay just underneath the bed, and the broom brought it out."

"It's very singular," mused Stafford, half aloud. "It isn't mine."

"Not yours," cried the maid of all work, a trifle pale. "It's true I never saw you wear one just like it, but then, you know, gentlemen have changes, and I thought—"

"That it was one of my substitute buttons, eh?"

"Exactly."

Stafford shook his head over the cuff button, and then placed it in his vest pocket.

"I guess I'll go down and brace up a little," he said. "I need a little wine, but you need not be alarmed, Miss Lucy, for I won't come home any more with a detective."

Ten minutes later Harley Stafford sat in a modest restaurant, smoking a cigar, and with a bottle before him.

He was not a drinker, by any means, but just then he thought that he needed a stimulant.

He was all alone in the corner which he had selected, and there he drew forth the cuff button and looked at it intently.

"It looks like the one he sometimes

wears, but what could he have been doing in my room," he mused. "I don't know of another pair of buttons like it—never saw their match in this city; but the girl is reliable, and she must have found this one where she said she did."

He finished his cigar and wine, and rose somewhat refreshed.

"I ought to go up-town and inquire after the president's health," he said to himself, as he walked toward the door. "He went home all tore up, and it isn't right that I haven't been to the house before this. But Cook has doubtless been to see the old man."

When he looked at his watch he saw that it was rather late for a call on his employer, and he resolved to call the first thing in the morning.

Stafford went home and locked himself in the little room which he had occupied for three years. He then took the fatal and mysterious button from his pocket and examined it again in the light of his lamp.

He had seen but one button just like it before, and that was attached to the cashier's cuff.

Yes, he remembered that Cadmus Cook wore such buttons at times, but he could not remember just when the cashier had last entered his room.

They used to smoke in his little chamber and tell stories, for they were friends, and Cook knew that some day, if all went well, his sister Nina would become Mrs. Stafford. They were on the best of terms, were the two gentlemen, and Stafford thought the cashier the pink of honor.

There was one gift that Cadmus Cook possessed which his friend Stafford was not permitted to have. He believed much in the occult, and had at one time been the pupil of a man who had wonderful power over the minds of many.

But while Cadmus was a mesmerist, he had never tried the spell on his friend, and Stafford, who did not take much stock in the art, had never sought to be placed under the influence.

On several occasions when all three were spending a merry evening in the house on Madison Avenue, Cadmus had tried his powers on his sister, and Nina had succumbed in the easiest manner.

"I'll go up and see him the first thing in the morning," said the teller, ere he retired that night, feeling none the worst for his adventure. "I'll then get a good look at Mrs. Shanks, provided she allows me that privilege—and that will be something out of the dull routine of a teller's life."

He had not ceased to think about the man in the Morgue—far from it.

That terrible face was before him the last thing ere he closed his eyes, and when he awoke in the night in a cold sweat, he thought that he was standing on the cold flags still looking at the mutilated hand.

It was light when he heard some one at his door and in a jiffy Stafford was there.

He opened the door to find a man in the hall, and the moment he saw the face he fell back with a half-suppressed cry.

The early caller came in and, stopping in the middle of the room, looked searchingly at the young fellow.

"You don't remember me, Harley?" said the man, who had a hunted look.

"Yes, but I do. You—"

"Come, you needn't speak the name aloud. I'll take it for granted that you recognize me. They're after me once more."

"After you?"

"Yes, the beagles, the police, the bloodhounds of the law!"

"What have you done now?"

"Done?" the man laughed. "What haven't I done?"

"But—"

"Oh, yes, you thought I took the last money you sent me and reformed. That's it. That's just what I thought I would do, but, hang it all, once a scoundrel, always one. That's not your opinion, for you've told me so. You're well fixed here, Harley."

The teller of the Goldstone Bank was looking at the man who, but for his dark, cadaverous face, would have been very handsome, and said nothing for a moment.

"You're in a peck of trouble up at the bank, you folks are," said the stranger.

"How do you know?"

"Never mind that. I happen to know."

"Some one has told it, then. It got into the papers, I suppose?"

"I haven't seen it there if it has," was the reply. "What I see with my own eyes I see, that's all."

The speaker grinned, and Stafford waited for him to proceed, but he did not.

"Yes, we had a little robbery up there, or rather down in Wall Street. One of our safes was broken open and—"

"Saturday night, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Saturday night."

"Didn't the burglar get pinched in some way?"

Stafford started.

"How pinched? Caught, you mean?"

"Caught in a realistic way. Say, Harley, I think I can put you on the trail."

"You? Well, it would be no use now. The man who robbed the bank is dead."

"Since when?"

"Since that same night."

"Pshaw! I know he isn't dead unless he died this morning. I saw him nursing his crippled hand not five hours ago."

Harley Stafford's look became a stare, and the next moment he had clutched the man by the arm.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE AT WORK IN EARNEST.

Meanwhile Detective Trailer had had his interview with the man in the bird store. This interview had taken place in the ferret's own room after his return from the Morgue, and the bird dealer had gone back to Mother Centipede.

The next day at an early hour the detective of Gotham might have been seen passing up the broad steps that led to Sergius Shanks' door.

He was admitted at once and conducted into a semi-lighted room on the right of the elegant hall, and there he found himself alone.

It was his first trip within the door of the banker's house, and but for the finger in the safe he might never have seen the inside of that house of wealth.

Mrs. Shanks, or Witch Winnie, as she was sometimes called, he had never seen to his recollection, and he wondered what sort of an interview he would have with her.

True, he had come to consult with her husband, if he was able to see him, but it was hardly to be supposed that he would get out of the mansion without seeing the banker's wife.

Trailer amused himself taking in the gorgeousness of the parlor furnished Orientaly, until he heard a footstep in the hall, and as he turned toward the door it opened.

A handsome woman, with a superb figure, which was arrayed in a sweeping morning gown of soft azure, stood before him. Of course this was Mrs. Shanks, and she came forward with a look that seemed to chill the detective's blood.

As we have already said, Winnie Shanks was thirty years her husband's junior.

The banker had married her quietly three years after the death of the first Mrs. Shanks, and those who knew the man and but little of the woman marveled much at the match.

"I have been expecting you, Mr. Trailer," said the banker's wife, seating herself. "It was a very unfortunate occurrence, and I trust you bring us good news this morning."

"As to the recovery of the articles that appear to have been taken from the safe at the bank, I can give you no satisfaction," was Trailer's answer.

"None at all? No news of the mutilated robber, either?"

The detective hesitated.

"Mr. Shanks, your husband, has told you all, then? He has given you a history of what we discovered at the bank after the safe had been opened?"

"Mr. Cook has given the most lucid account. My husband's nerves are still unstrung, and I am sorry to say that I fear he will not be able to see you this morning."

Tracy Trailer wanted to see the banker

himself, but at the same time he was glad to have an opportunity to interview the wife. He had heard a good deal of this woman, and all within the past ten hours; and now he was to have a long interview with her at home unless she terminated it for cause.

"While I would like to see him, I will not insist. True I have no news for him, and no news is good news, you know."

A faint smile came to the well-shaped lips of the woman and lingered there for an instant.

"It was a strange occurrence. I have had but one other case of the kind in my career, and that was similar in many respects."

"A hand caught in a safe door, you mean?"

"Exactly, and in pretty much the same way, though it was not in a bank."

"Mr. Cook must have been horrified from the way he talked. May I ask what you have done with—with the finger, Mr. Trailer?"

"We have put it away as a witness."

"I see. You expect some day to fit it to the hand to which it belongs?"

"Stranger things than that have happened, you know."

"Yes. But—"

Just then there was heard a noise in another part of the house and the word "Winnie," twice repeated, floated into the room.

Mrs. Shanks turned a trifle pale and rose quickly.

"It is my husband calling. You will have to excuse me a moment."

In another instant she had flitted from the parlor, leaving the door slightly ajar, and the detective heard her on the stair.

He leaned toward the door himself, almost bending his agile body from the chair, and listened, for already he heard voices.

"Be quiet a little longer," he heard Mrs. Shanks say to some one. "I'll interest him a few moments and then let him out."

"But I'd like to see him a little while—just a minute," pleaded Sergius Shanks.

"You cannot!"

"I know who's down there. I heard the voice in the bank, and he may have found a clew."

"He says he has found none, and you know that Doctor George has said that, above all things, you need rest."

"To perdition with doctors!" cried the banker. "I'm going down. I must see the man down-stairs."

"But I say you shall not; not just yet."

Detective Trailer heard all this, thanks to a line of doors ajar, and a singular expression came to his face.

"I want to tell him something. That man has it in his power to prolong my life or to cut it short. I want to make a statement."

"In my presence, of course?"

"Well, hardly," with a light chuckle of derision. "I want to tell him something in secret, madam."

"Not now—not this morning," was the determined reply. "You will keep this room till I say that you may go down-stairs."

There seemed to be a slight struggle, as if the woman was keeping the old man back by main force, and at last the keen-eyed detective heard a key click in its lock.

"She's come out ahead," he said to himself. "She has locked the old man in."

In another second there was the rustling of a gown on the varnished steps and presently Winnie Shanks re-entered the parlor.

No trace of her stormy interview upstairs was observable on her countenance, and she dropped back into the chair and turned her striking face upon the man-hunter.

"My husband had one of his nervous spells. Fortunately, we have it in our hands to subdue them before they give him much trouble. He regrets very much that he is not able to see you now, but he hopes he will be in better condition the next time you call."

"Of course he has acquainted you with his loss?" said Trailer, watching the wom-

an narrowly from beneath his brows. "He did not seem to have lost money, but something more valuable."

"Oh, you mean that which was taken from the drawer of the safe?"

"Yes, madam."

A smile at once passed over the woman's face and she leaned forward confidentially in the chair.

"I am about to make a confession, which, as yet, is a secret from the world," she began. "As you know from your experience with the world at large, Mr. Trailer, few families are without their skeletons. We have ours with the rest of them, and this is nothing less than my husband's hallucinations."

"His hallucinations, madam?"

"Just so. I can call the disease by no other name, and, while it has not destroyed his business mind, it has caused me a great deal of annoyance."

"I was not aware of this before, but until the robbery, remember, I had not encountered him."

"The robbery? There was no robbery at all. That is the only conclusion we can reach—Mr. Cook and myself—and the doctor inclines to the same opinion."

"But the finger in the safe, madam? You do not call that a delusion, also?"

Winnie Shanks flushed.

"That, I must confess, is real. I do not doubt that some vulgar burglar attempted to rob the safe, but, somehow or other, he must have been frightened from his work, for, as Mr. Cook informs me, nothing belonging to the bank or to my husband was taken."

"Mr. Shanks was very positive, and he certainly acted like one who had been plundered."

"That is what he seems to believe, but it is all in his imagination."

Detective Trailer said nothing. He was waiting for the woman to proceed, which she would do now she had got started.

"We first noticed this on Mr. Shanks almost a year ago. His disease took a queer turn six months later, and once he thought he had been robbed of a string of opals which he said he kept at the bank, while to my certain knowledge there has never been an opal in this family. My jewels are all diamonds."

"What turn has his hobby taken lately?"

"One that sounds almost incredible," was the reply. "It will provoke a smile—I know it will. It is nothing less than this: He believes that he was robbed of some papers which reveal his past life, and which, if given out to the world, would ruin him now."

"But there is nothing in his past that would compromise him."

"Nothing at all. It is only a delusion. Didn't he say when he looked into the empty drawer at the bank that his 'old enemy' was at work?"

"He said something of the kind, madam."

"He has said it a thousand times since. He raves about it every now and then, but it is all here and nowhere else," and Winnie Shanks laid one of her jeweled fingers upon her forehead.

"Of course, we are willing that you shall remain on the case. It is better thus than for the world to know that my husband is a shattered old man whose mind is drifting away. We will see that you are well paid for your services, Mr. Trailer, and you may crawl on us whenever you see fit."

It was a strange situation for the detective.

He recalled what he already knew—the dead man at the Morgue, the two interviews, one with afford, the teller, and the other with the man at the bird store; and then he remembered the altercation he had just heard in the upper room.

Certainly the voice of Sergius Shanks did not sound like the voice of a madman. It was firm and clear, and there was nothing about it to indicate approaching imbecility.

"Shall I call again to-morrow?" he asked.

"I will let you know. I have your address, I believe; Mr. Cook gave it to me."

Yes, I will let you know if anything turns up here, but I hope my husband will be able to see you the next time you come."

Detective Trailer rose and went to the door. As he entered the hall he glanced up-stairs and caught a glimpse of a figure as it flitted out of sight.

"I know I lost them! They were there when I last opened the little safe, and I could tell that man something that would open his eyes, but they won't let me."

"That's my husband again," said Mrs. Shanks, with a nod toward the upper landing. "He generally quiets down after taking his drops. I will have to see to him at once. Good-morning, Mr. Trailer. You will report to us if you should find a clew to the opening of the safe, for remember there was no robbery. It is merely an old man's delusion."

Was it?

Detective Trailer, on the sidewalk before the Madison Avenue mansion, wondered if he was not upon the most exciting trail of his life, for he said to himself as he walked away:

"It's desperate, dark and dangerous."

CHAPTER VI.

A HUNTED MAN'S VENOM.

"You don't mean that, Tom?"

"Don't I? See here, Harley Stafford; there's a great social gulf between us. You are a bank employee and I'm but a poor hunted dog, hounded down all the time by the beagles of the law and at all times in the shadow of the manacles. You could go before a court and say that you saw my hand commit murder and they'd believe you, and I, with my past against me, could follow and deny, but they'd just laugh at me. That's the difference with us."

"But of course I don't intend to do anything to keep you down. Your statement that the man who robbed the Goldstone Bank is not dead surprised me, and—"

"I thought it would, and I don't wonder. I've seen the maimed hand since dark last night. I've been pretty close to it, and, what is more, I can take you to the doctor who dressed it Saturday night. I don't say that he is the man who left his finger in old Shanks' safe, but you can draw an inference."

Harley Stafford looked at the man before him.

They had been friends and playmates in boyhood, but their life paths had drifted apart, and while he (Stafford) had been favored by fortune, the other had been overshadowed by evil, and he was, as he said, "a poor, hunted dog."

"Don't you want to find out who got the swag?" continued Tom Mattoon.

"Of course, I'd like to know who the man is you have seen. But don't you think it would be best to tell a detective—"

"Do you want them to laugh at me? But I'll show you, Harley, and if there's anything in it, why, you shall have all the praise."

"Where is the man with the maimed hand?"

"I'd rather take you there than tell you. But I would sooner hide like an owl during daytime and go abroad at night. That is my harvest time."

"Where do you live now, Tom?"

"I don't live; I just exist, like many of my class, Harley. Say I rest here to-day. You'll be at the bank, won't you? There will be nobody in the room, eh?"

"No one but the girl who keeps it clean."

"I don't like women any more—haven't liked them ever since the police got Vivian to peach on me."

"You are welcome to stay here all day if you care to. I think I can make it all right with Lucy. I'll tell her not to make up my room to-day."

"Stafford, you're a brick, and I'll be as quiet as a mouse. You've got a nice bed, but I'll bunk on the sofa yonder. My clothes are none the best, and, then, a sofa just suits a dog like Tom Mattoon."

"You'll show me to-night where the man is, won't you?"

"Won't I, Stafford?" cried the other, laughing. "I'll show you where I left him, at any rate, and I think I can convince

you that he had a mutilated hand dressed the night of the robbery."

Mattoon, who had a slouching gait caused by dodging the police so long, moved over to the sofa and threw himself down upon it with a sigh of ecstasy.

"This is a bed of roses," he exclaimed, glancing at Stafford, who began to make his toilet preparatory to going to his post of duty at the bank. "How did it strike old Shanks, eh, Harley?"

"It broke him up completely."

"What was taken? How much in cash?"

"Not a dollar, that I know of."

"Come, man. Don't tell me that not a dollar was taken, and that the president is all broke up over the burglary. I hope the loss of the burglar's finger didn't collapse Shanks."

"I don't think so, Tom; but he's a strange man, and his loss—"

"Oh, he lost something, did he?"

"He says so, at any rate."

"What was it, Stafford? Did he keep any written secrets in there?"

Stafford shook his head.

"You don't know, eh? What have you been doing in the Goldstone Bank all this time?"

"Attending strictly to my duties."

The man on the sofa gave a prolonged whistle of amazement, and then laughed.

"By Jove! you're an exception. Now, if I had been there, Stafford, old boy, I'd have known what was in that safe to the smallest bit of paper."

"No doubt of that, Tom."

"Yes, sir, I'd have known just what was in that little drawer which knocked Shanks silly when it was opened and discovered to be empty. You had a rare opportunity to enrich yourself, and I'll bet some one has done it."

Stafford bit his lip and looked in the glass again.

"Do you think Cadmus Cook knew?" asked Mattoon.

"No, sir, I do not."

"Then it must have been because he hadn't a chance to get at the steel drawer."

"You are a mite severe on the cashier."

"Am I? A little severe, eh? I don't think I am. All that glitters is not gold, Stafford, and there's a good deal of glitter about Cadmus Cook."

Stafford, the teller, did not reply, but kept on with his toilet and at last turned away, dressed for the day.

"I'd like to repeat that last remark of mine," said Mattoon, the fugitive. "I'd just like to say it again, if you'll permit me, that it wasn't Cook's fault if he didn't know what was in that drawer. I know the cashier of the Goldstone Bank."

"I was not aware of that, Tom."

"Never told you, did I? I didn't think it worth while to tell you, for, by Jove! it's to no man's credit to know Cadmus Cook, certainly not to mine."

Harley Stafford flushed a little and bit his lower lip. At the same time it rather amused him to think that a man whose life had been very shady, to say nothing criminal against him, should consider himself better than Cadmus Cook, the cashier.

"Oh, you needn't look that way," cried Tom Mattoon. "But, holy smoke! Stafford, I didn't expect to insult you. You like Cook, and perhaps have a sort o' friendly feeling for his sister, Nina. Fine girl, that. Wish the world was full of Nina Cooks. If it had been I wouldn't be lying here on your sofa hiding from the beagles of the law like a hunted fox."

At mention of Nina's name Stafford flushed deeply, at which the other smiled, but did not again refer to the girl.

"I'll go, if I've hurt your feelings," said he, rising, and picking up the slouch hat he had thrown to the floor. "I don't want to remain here and not be welcome. But what I said about Cadmus Cook I can't take back. I know the man. I know more about the elegant cashier than does his sister's friend, Harley Stafford."

Stafford told Mattoon that he should stay where he was, and, after telling him that he would tell Lucy, the maid, that he had a sick friend keeping house for him that day, he bade him good-morning.

He recalled his intention, formed the night before, to visit Sergius Shanks' mansion, but, seeing that he was a little late and that it would hustle him to get to the bank on time, he resolved to defer the visit till that afternoon.

He turned into Wall Street a few minutes later than usual, and reached the bank after a rapid walk.

Outwardly there was nothing to tell him that anything unusual had occurred, much less that a human finger had been found behind the safe's door.

The door of Sergius Shanks' private office stood ajar, and as he passed over to his desk he caught sight of a man in there.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stafford," said a voice, at sound of which the young teller turned.

Winnie Shanks, the banker's wife, stood before him. She had just come out of the private office in company with Cadmus Cook.

"I could not resist the temptation to come down and see for myself," she went on, as the teller bowed.

"There is not much to see now," was the reply. "The sensation is passed."

"Yes, and I am almost ready to say that I regret it. I would like to have seen the ghastly trophy which the steel safe secured."

"You will have to call on Mr. Traller for that."

Mrs. Shanks laughed, and said that she did not believe her curiosity would take her quite that far.

"How is Mr. Shanks this morning?" asked Stafford.

"Somewhat improved, thank you, but still very nervous. Mr. Cook and I have been talking the matter over, and we have reached a conclusion. Will you please step into the office, Mr. Stafford?"

The young teller walked into the cozy little apartment, and stood face to face with Mrs. Shanks.

"Pardon me," said she, with an arch smile. "You were out last night, I believe?"

Suddenly all color deserted Stafford's face, and then it as suddenly came back, deepening, until he was conscious that he had already answered the woman before he had spoken a word.

"It's all right. But, Mr. Stafford, don't you think it would be best if you did not go to the Morgue and such places after dark?"

She knew, then. She was aware that he had accompanied Detective Traller to the Morgue. She knew that he had been abroad, and perhaps knew more than this.

He had been watched. His movements had been dogged by some one, and Winnie Shanks, the banker's wife, knew all about them.

There was nothing for Stafford to do but to confess.

"I went to the Morgue under very peculiar circumstances," said he. "You are perhaps aware that there lies the body of a man whose lips, could they speak, might solve the mystery of the robbery of the safe."

"I can't say that I know," was the quick answer. "I wish you would not make such trips, Mr. Stafford. I know how you went thither, and why. It was my duty, being the wife of Sergius Shanks, to know."

Stafford was silent.

A footstep passed the door, and seemed to pause at the threshold a moment.

Was some one listening outside?

Stafford thought so, at any rate, but he dared not open that door.

"Don't be so indiscreet again, Mr. Stafford. We have a detective on the trail, and one is enough. I have influence with the powers that be. You are teller here. Be nothing else. I don't play night spy, or off goes your head!"

And with this Winnie Shanks swept from the private office.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FACE NIPSIE SAW.

Tracy Traller, after leaving the Madison Avenue mansion, went back to the little place he inhabited.

He had much to think about, and could not forget the pleadings of the old man to be allowed to come down-stairs and see him.

It was his first interview with Winnie Shanks, and he secretly resolved that it should not be his last.

Immediately after the detective's visit Mrs. Shanks went down to the bank, and while there met Stafford, the teller, in the interview we have just witnessed.

The identity of the dead man with the missing finger, who still encumbered the slabs at the Morgue, had not been established, and the authorities were not a little perplexed.

In hopes of getting something definite about him, Traller went back to the tenement in which he had found him dead.

It was an old trap, not as good as the one in which Nipsie Atom lived, and he ascended the three flights of stairs to the floor where Number Six's room was.

The day was well advanced, and the detective found himself at the door, which was unlocked.

He saw at once that some one had been ahead of him, besides those who had taken the body down.

The dare-devil detective shut the door and went over the room again.

There was a dark stain on the floor where the body had been found, and the furniture had been replaced.

All at once he looked out of the window and toward the house occupied by his little friend, Nipsie.

He had raised the drab curtain, and the first thing he saw was a face at the opposite window, the face of the child.

She seemed to recognize the ferret at once, for she nodded pleasantly and made out that she had something to say.

Traller raised the sash and smiled.

"Come over when you get through there. I've seen something else," said the child, who had raised her window also.

"All right, Nipsie. I'll be with you in a few minutes."

The detective went to work again. He looked everywhere for a clue to the dead man's identity, and tried to make out some old marks on one of the walls.

Whatever had been written there had been obliterated, or nearly so, but he made out a part of a sentence:

"If I die here, tell—"

That was all.

If the writer had ever finished that sentence he (Traller) might never know it.

Then the writer, whoever he was, had an enemy, for did not the broken sentence intimate as much?

It was too much for the man of clews, and though he strained his eyes, he could not make out another word.

Perhaps that sentence had never been finished; perhaps the enemy came while it was being traced on the wall. Who knows?

The room was light enough, thanks to the absence of the curtain, and Traller saw everything.

He got through at last. For once thoroughly baffled in a room in which he had confidently hoped to find a clue of some kind, he turned to the door.

"I'll see what Nipsie has to say now," he said, aloud.

In another moment, he turned the knob and pulled the door open.

At the same time he took a last look at the room, his eye roaming round it from the door itself.

Why did he start and drop the catch? Why did he cross the room as straight as an experienced marksman would have sent an arrow, and stop near the wall, nearly opposite the door?

From the door he had seen a little shiny thing in the wall.

He had not noticed it before, not even while sounding that very wall, and only from the door was it to be seen, and then under very favorable circumstances.

Now he lost the button, but now he found it again, and in another moment his thumb had pressed it.

A door deftly set in the wall slid to one side. It was a secret cupboard, of which the detective had no knowledge, and he might have sounded the wall till doomsday without striking the button.

The opening of the slide was a new incident in the hunt. It made Trailer's eyes glow with satisfaction, and he tiptoed to look into the aperture.

But it was empty. There was nothing in the hole in the wall but a lot of dust which had been disturbed lately.

Something had been pulled from the hole, that was plain, and it was to be seen that a small hand had dragged the treasure forth.

The dead man had something to fight for then. He was the guardian of a secret which had cost him his life.

The New York detective looked long and intently into the opening. He ran his hand into it till he touched a hard substance, the partition of the room opposite.

There he stopped; he had to stop.

"Nothing here—not for me, at least. Whatever was in this hole last has been removed, and I am none the wiser for it."

He shut the slide, and a faint click was heard.

He left the room and went down the stairs. On the second landing he was confronted by the same woman who had met him on his first visit to the fatal room.

"Back ag'in, are ye?" she said. "Seems to me ye'r' a hunter, I don't know."

Trailer stopped. This woman might know something. She knew that the dead man was called Number Six? Why should she not know more?

"Yes," he said, with a smile, "I'm back again, my good lady."

"Looking for Number Six's luggage, I s'pect. He 'adn't any."

"Nothing at all? Not even a trunk, eh?"

"What would a man like him want with a trunk? Does a bird what flies to-day and alights ter-morrer want a grip or a trunk, I don't know?"

"Oh, he was a bird of passage, then?"

"That's about it. A bird of passage, and he didn't wear the finest plumage, either."

"What did you hear or see Saturday night?"

"I never see and 'ear anything, I don't."

"You mean when you don't want to?"

"Just so," and a broad smile came to the dark face which confronted the detective. "I'm a good woman, I am, and there's no one who can lay the p'int of a finger on a blur in the life of Eliza Jane Jaggers."

"Which is very good, Mrs. Jaggers. But you knew that he was Number Six—"

"Didn't he tell me so himself?"

"Oh, you held communication with the dead man, then."

"No, sir, it was no communication at all. He just come in one night and flung himself down on my chair and said, said he, 'Mrs. Jaggers, if you find me dead in that little den some morning, you will see that Number Six gets a decent burial.'"

The woman shut up like a clam. A dirty-faced child of seven came into the hallway and clung to her skirts.

"See what he give Bessie," said the little one, taking from her neck a little locket attached to a thin gold chain.

Mrs. Jaggers pushed the child back into the room and shut the door in her face.

"He didn't give it to Bessie. It was another man," she said, with a scared face. "Indeed, the time he came in and talked about seeing that Number Six got a decent burial was the only time he ever crossed my threshold."

This ended the interview, and the woman went back into her room, leaving Trailer to pursue his way to the street, which he did.

Three minutes later he heard Nipsie Atom's cheery voice and stood before the child.

He went over to her, and bent over her frail white face, but at the same time looked toward the house with the drab curtain.

"I thought you were never coming to me," said the child. "I wanted to tell you that some one came back to that room."

"When, Nipsie?"

"It was quite early this morning. I was wide awake, and lying on the bed with my curtain up just enough to let me see that window from my pillow."

"Was it so very early, child?"

"It must have been about five, for I soon heard a clock strike, but it was so far off and I was a little confused, so I could not tell the exact hour. The curtain was pulled up. I could see the hand that did it."

"Of course you watched it very closely?"

"With my two little eyes. I wanted to see all I could to pay you for the bird."

"Oh, that's been paid for long ago. But the curtain, Nipsie?"

"Yes, yes. By and by a face came to the window and looked out."

"Toward your house, child?"

"Right at my window. I saw ery plainly. It was a face I had never seen before."

"Oh, you saw it pretty well, did you?"

"Why, it was pressed close to the glass, and as the light fell upon it I got a good look."

"Was it a young face?"

"I should say the face of a man of about your age, Tracy. It was a very handsome face, with a mustache and dark side whiskers, which were not very large. They were quite dark, though, and seemed pasted to the sides of the face."

"What a little observer you are, Nipsie."

"I was using my eyes for you, Tracy."

"Thanks. How long did the face remain at the window?"

"Not very long. I may have looked a whole minute, but a minute is a long time sometimes, you know."

"Was the curtain pulled down after the face vanished?" asked the detective.

"It came down just as the face went away. That was all I saw. But I will never forget that face. I would know it anywhere, but then, I will never get to see it only when it comes to the window over there."

"I may bring the man up to see you one of these days, Nipsie."

"What? to this room? You don't mean that, Tracy?"

"Wait and see, child. But I must go now. Don't forget the window, and if you see anything more there you can send me word by Bantam. He drops in every day, doesn't he?"

"Regularly. It would be a dark world without Bantam, with his stories of the streets and the town. Send you word? Of course I will."

The detective left the place and went down upon the street.

As he emerged from the tall old house a carriage rolled by, nearly running over a child playing in the middle of the dirty thoroughfare.

"Keep out of the road, you little brat," cried a voice, as a face was poked out of the carriage window.

Tracy Trailer saw the face and smiled.

"What brings you to this part of town, Mrs. Shanks?" he said, as the carriage vanished.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SLIT IN THE BLIND.

Remembering his engagement with Tom Mattoon, Stafford, the teller, was eager to get away from the bank.

Mattoon had promised to show him the man with the missing finger, and he, doubting Tom's ability to do so, was anxious to go with the man.

But first Stafford thought of his intended visit to Sergius Shanks, but since his interview with Winnie he was not so anxious to enter the house on Madison avenue.

He resolved, however, to tell Detective Trailer about his visit from Tom Mattoon, and ask him what he thought of the hunted man's story.

Just as soon as he could get off, Stafford made his way to the building occupied in part by the Gotham shadower, and knocked at his door.

It was Stafford's first visit to the ferret's house, and he was at a loss to know just how to comport himself. But the first words of the detective put him at his ease and he was soon telling Trailer all about his hunted friend.

"What do you think of it?" asked Stafford, when he had finished his story. "If the man who robbed the safe lies dead in the Morgue, then Tom Mattoon

cannot show him to me in another part of the city alive."

"Very true, Mr. Stafford. You will go with him all the same."

"And report to you afterward?"

"I don't think that will be necessary. I will let you know, however."

"Does Mrs. Shanks visit the bank often?"

"She comes down now and then, but of late her visits have been less frequent."

"Comes down to see her husband and take him home, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; she goes home with him."

"Is she on good terms with you people at the bank?"

"I believe so."

"How about Mr. Cook?"

Stafford started a little. He recalled what Tom Mattoon had said about the cashier, and he had resented his suspicions. Now here Tracy Trailer had referred to him.

"So far as I know, the cashier and Mrs. Shanks are friendly, nothing more, I'm sure."

"Was she at the bank to-day?"

"She was there."

"You saw her, of course?"

Stafford inclined his head, but did not speak.

"Look here, Mr. Stafford, you may think that I am very impertinent, but remember I am at work and when on the trail I generally work hard."

"That's all right; I don't blame you for asking these questions."

"I'm glad of that. You say you saw Mrs. Shanks to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"And talked with her?"

"But a moment."

"How was her manner? Was it reserved or commanding?"

"It was rather commanding."

"Just so. As the wife of Sergius Shanks, she commanded, did she?"

"A little," admitted the teller.

Trailer seemed at that moment to observe an object on the opposite wall, but in reality he was thinking deeply. He turned slowly to his visitor and seemed to transfix Stafford with his keen eyes.

"I don't think there is any need of a mask in this matter," he said, in his calm manner. "Mr. Stafford, you can help straighten out the coil if you will."

"I can't say that I fully understand you," was the reply, spoken in a low tone. "You surely don't want me to—"

The teller stopped of his own accord, as if he had caught himself trespassing on dangerous ground.

"You will proceed, Mr. Stafford. I did not say anything."

Stafford seemed to choke. He looked at the detective and then pushed back his chair.

"You want me to lose my position, don't you?" he cried at last.

"By no means. I only want you to do what I consider your duty in this case. It is a matter which concerns more people than Sergius Shanks and yourself. It is a matter not only of robbery, but of life and death. Murder has been done and the victim lies in the Morgue awaiting burial in the Potter's Field. You have seen the body. You took one long look and then sank to the flagging insensible. You had cause for that faint."

Stafford's face was white and blank.

"You thought you recognized the dead man," continued the detective, looking searchingly into his visitor's face.

"I thought so at first. I thought I saw a resemblance to the face of a person whom I knew years and years ago, but I am now convinced that I was mistaken."

"What has convinced you?"

"Reflection. I have thought a good deal about the dead man since our visit to the Morgue, and I am now sure that I did not see my old acquaintance there."

Stafford looked toward the door. He wanted to go down to the sidewalk and turn his face homeward. This detective was cutting a little too close.

"Did Cadmus Cook ever know the person to whom you have just referred?" queried Trailer

"I—I think not."

"You are not sure that he was not acquainted with that person? You are not positive, I see."

"I have heard of people who are too positive. While I will not say that the dead man was the friend of whom I have spoken, I am not going to be positive about it. One can be mistaken, you know."

The detective nodded slightly.

"When will Tom Mattoon show you the man he has in his mind?" asked Trailer.

"Soon after dark, I suppose."

"Very well. Keep your eyes open while with that man and take a good look at the man to be shown you."

"I'll do that, you may be sure. Mattoon may think he has seen the robber since Saturday night, but he also may be very much mistaken."

Harley Stafford picked up his hat and walked toward the door. He was going to get out of the trap and was glad of it.

"Mr. Stafford, did you ever see anything strange about the president of the Goldstone Bank?" suddenly asked the ferret.

Stafford stopped with his hand on the catch and looked at the detective.

"Anything strange?" he echoed. "Do you mean to ask me if I ever saw any symptoms of insanity?"

"Of feeble mind. You have seen a great deal of Sergius Shanks. You must have watched him a good deal during his stay at the bank. He is old, a little past sixty, I believe, and he must have had a busy life."

"I can't say that I have ever noticed anything strange about him. I always thought him a well-preserved man."

"Did Mrs. Shanks or Mr. Cook, or any of those near you, ever intimate that the president was falling?"

Stafford reflected a moment; and then, looking up, caught the keen eye of the city sharp.

"Since I think of it, about a week ago I was asked the same question you have just put."

"Ah! By whom, Mr. Stafford?"

"By Cook. We were dining at the time and fell to talking about men who break down early in life and those who retain all their faculties to a very green old age. He then asked me in passing if I had ever detected anything wrong mentally about Mr. Shanks. I answered that I had not, and the matter was dropped."

"And has never been broached since?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

Once more Stafford congratulated himself that he was at liberty. He opened the door and bowed himself across the threshold. As he went down the stairs he looked back over his shoulder and saw a child dodge into the room occupied by the detective.

"Who the deuce was that?" mentally ejaculated the teller. "I am sure I saw a little girl go into the ferret's room. Who is she? I never knew he had a protegee; but then we don't know anything at all about these men-hunters."

He passed from the house and turned his face homeward.

Tracy Trailer approached the child whom he had seen place herself in a chair and bent over her.

"You saw him very well, did you, Nipsie?" asked the eager man.

"Oh, yes; I had a real good look at him. That was not the man, Tracy."

"Not the man you saw at the window opposite your little room?"

"Not the man, I say. You see, the face was full in the light and I had a good look at it. It was an older face than his, but it was a very handsome one. Better luck next time, perhaps."

"I hope so. I will take you back presently, but you will keep house for me a while, won't you?"

"Of course. You have a neat little room here, but Bantam wouldn't know where to find me."

Trailer laughed and left the room and the child.

Meanwhile Stafford was on his way home. He quickened his gait, for he

was anxious to see if Tom Mattoon still occupied his room, and the moment he turned the key he was greeted by his friend's voice. The room was redolent with the fumes of tobacco, and Tom still lay on the sofa as if he had occupied it all day.

"It's a snug place to hide," said he, looking at Stafford. "I tell you, Harley, I do believe I could hide here a year and not be found out by the beagles. But I'd grow tired of this. I wouldn't know what to do with myself."

"You haven't been disturbed, Tom?"

"No. I put on your clothes and went down and got a snack. But it's getting dusk, I see; nearly time for your jaunt."

"When shall we set out?" asked the teller.

"The sooner the better, perhaps. I don't care about being seen, for I'm public property with these policemen, and they wouldn't hesitate to drag me in on sight."

"Shall we go now?"

"Wait, say, an hour. It will be darker then."

Stafford, a little impatient, agreed to wait, and when the hour was up Mattoon rose and pulled up his collar.

"It's nearer than you think," said he, with a look. "I guess I can show you the man with the maimed hand."

They set out together, and after ten minutes' walk Tom Mattoon turned into the mouth of an alley with Stafford at his heels. Some distance down the alley the felon stopped and ran his hand through a circular hole in a gate which he opened, letting them into a cramped yard in the rear of a house.

"We'll have to do some peeping," he said, in a whisper. "Now, here we are. No dogs, thank fortune. Ah, here's the window with the slit in the blind. There's a light beyond, too. Now stick your peepers forward and see what you see."

The young teller of the Goldstone Bank leaned toward the window and glued his face against the pane. The inside blinds had been drawn, but, as Mattoon had said, there was a convenient slit in them.

"Look sharp," whispered Tom.

Stafford did so and a minute later he fell back with a cry which he could not suppress.

"I told you so!" triumphantly cried Tom.

"Heavens!" gasped Stafford. "I never knew he had a double."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEAD MAN'S BROTHER.

The room into which the two men looked was not an elegant one. It had its counterpart in many parts of the city. The ceiling was quite lofty and the walls dark and dingy. There was but little furniture in the place, and what there was of it was poor.

The room was occupied at the time. A man reclined on the lounge at one side of the chamber with his face turned toward the window.

It was a face which had some striking characteristics, as Stafford, the teller, saw them, and while he looked the man seemed to fix his eyes on the window itself.

One hand was thrown over the body, and therefore was not visible; the other hung over the edge of the cot and the long fingers pointed toward the floor.

"It's the hidden hand," said Tom Mattoon's lips at Stafford's ear. "That is the hand which is mutilated. Didn't I see the little doctor across the street dress it that same night? I tell you, Harley, you are looking at the man who left one of his fingers in old Shanks' safe."

Stafford could not resist the temptation to turn upon the speaker and clutch his arm.

"Then, if that is the burglar, in God's name who was the man found dead by the police and taken to the Morgue?"

Mattoon shook his head.

"I'm dealing with the living, not with the dead. I have nothing to do with Morgue rats. There is the man I promised to show you, and I'll stake my head

that he robbed the bank, for I tracked him from Wall Street myself."

"You did?"

"Didn't I? Came across him accidentally. When I see a man wobbling down the sidewalk holding his hand as if to stop the flow of blood, I know something's up, and when the hour is past midnight and the man bolts for a doctor's, I am sure he's been somewhere where honest men don't go at that hour. That's the story, Stafford. There's your man. Wait till he moves and shows up the other hand."

They waited, standing before the window with the closed blinds, their faces at the slit and their eyes greedily devouring the watched one's slightest movement.

"He's going to show up now," said Mattoon, as the man moved a good deal on the lounge. "There comes the hand into full view. Now!"

At the same time the young teller of the Goldstone uttered a cry and then turned upon Mattoon.

The face of the hunted felon was white. It had lost every vestige of color.

"That's a good hand, Tom," said Stafford.

There was no reply. The man at his side was actually gasping.

"Can't you see that he has no missing finger?" continued the teller. "Look good and don't let your eyes deceive you. That's a whole hand, I say."

"It is, by Jove!"

The man was sitting on the edge of the lounge and those outside were looking at him unperceived.

Tom Mattoon was too astonished to say another word. He had been completely beaten, and the triumphant look which had come unbidden into Stafford's eyes worried him not a little.

"Come! This is not the man we're looking for," said the teller. "You've been hoodwinked nicely."

"But I saw the little doctor dress the hand. I'll swear I did!"

"But not that hand. Impossible! for new fingers don't grow out in forty-eight hours."

"Well, something's happened. I've a mind to go in and ask him to explain."

"And get shot for your trouble? Look at the hangdog expression on that face. I never saw anything like it."

"He's one of my kind. We're in the same category, that man and me. Well, if you say so, we won't interview him—not to-night. But he is the very image of the man I saw with the mutilated finger. They must be brothers."

"I can't say. Let's go back."

They drew away from the window and passed through the little yard to the closed gate.

They did not see the dark figure crouched in the yard near the house. They did not see a man rise after they had reached the gate and slip toward that same window.

The dark figure stopped there and found the slit in the blind without much trouble.

A face was pressed close to the glass, and for some time a pair of eyes noted for their keenness regarded the occupant of the old frayed lounge.

The watcher this time was Tracy Trailer, the Dare-Devil Detective.

He had followed Stafford and Tom Mattoon from the former's house and had entered the garden at their heels.

"The resemblance is remarkable," said the detective to himself. "I am not surprised that Tom Mattoon was deceived, but I know the man in there. I haven't seen him for five years, and the last time he said he wouldn't come back for seven. But there he is. I'll see him at once."

The ferret tapped lightly on the window, and the man sprang up like a roused lion.

He looked first at the window and then at the door, his bosom heaving with half-suppressed excitement and his eyes seemingly on fire.

Trailer tapped again a little louder.

The man crossed the room, he stopped near the window and leaned toward it.

In another moment he had boldly thrown up the blind and was looking into the face of the detective.

He laughed, then flung down the blind and sprang to the door on his left.

He had recognized Trailer's face.

The ferret was at the door by the time the bolt was shot back, and in another moment he stood in the room.

"So you found me with ease. That's Tracy Trailer all over. He scents a rat at all hours."

The man spoke with a dark grin on his face and held out his long hand toward the detective.

"You're a little ahead of time, Gideon," said the shadower.

"Two years, I think, but you see I had to come back. I couldn't stay away another day. Fate said 'Go back,' and here I am."

There were two chairs in the room, but one was so badly broken as to be worth nothing as a seat, and while Trailer took the good one, the other man went back to the lounge, where he sat down.

"Who peached on me?" asked the strange man. "But there! Don't tell me. I don't care to know. I know that you have found me and that's enough."

Trailer drew back and looked down at the hand which lay in the speaker's lap.

"You've lost none of your fingers, Gid," said he.

"Of course not. Why should I lose any?"

"In this you're lucky. Where have you been so long?"

"Everywhere. You see, Tracy, one has to go almost to the end of the world to get rid of the ferrets. I've been everywhere, to be drawn back here for the final spoil."

"But you've reformed, haven't you, Gid?"

"Yes, when I have settled the old account."

"With the man who swore against you?"

"That's it. See here. I've saved all the accounts of it."

The man thrust one hand into his bosom and drew forth a package wrapped in oiled silk. He laid it in his lap and began to open it slowly.

"I know it all by heart. Here are all the accounts—not one is missing. Here they tell how Gideon Glare was sent to Sing Sing by the oath of a man named Sergius Shanks."

"Yes, I recall the trial."

"Of course you do, Tracy. I remember seeing you in the court room at the time. But never mind that. That man swore me up."

"He's in trouble now himself."

"How? In trouble? Sergius Shanks? Why, isn't he rich?"

"He's the president of a bank."

"Just so. He was well off when he settled me. I believe I heard that he lost his wife soon after I went up the river."

"He did, but he got another."

"Tell me! Who caught the old gold bug?"

"Gideon, you must have known his present wife. You seemed to know a good many people five years ago, and some of them you must have cause to recollect. But this woman, Sergius Shanks married a woman thirty years his junior."

"The deuce he did! A woman with money?"

"A woman as poor as Lazarus, but as proud as Lucifer and the possessor of a pretty face."

"Which caught the old scoundrel?" cried the man on the lounge. "Did I ever know her? I hardly understand you, Tracy. You see I never went in the best of society—never belonged to the Four Hundred. I was barred out, ha, ha!"

It was a cold, bitter laugh, as if the man hated all the world, and especially that part of it which wore good clothes.

"You remember Mother Centipede?" said the detective.

"The little woman who sold birds and played dark hands of other kinds?"

"Yes, the little woman down in Canal Street."

"I know her. She's not Italian, though she looks it. Her brogue is all assumed, and she can play anything you want her to. That bird store's all a blind, Tracy. Did you ever see the little workshop under it?"

"I never got that far, because I had no need to inquire after Mother Centipede's business beyond the cages."

"Well, go and look. That little place down there has its secrets which few people know. But why drag her into the play while telling me about the rich banker's wife?"

"At one time Winnie Shanks lived with Mother Centipede."

"What? That gives her a good pedigree. When she grew up and got pretty enough to trap a man like old Shanks I suppose she bade the bird shop an affectionate adieu and went into the matrimonial business. Let me think. I used to see the interior of that underground workshop. Have I ever seen the girl there?"

"Perhaps not. Mrs. Shanks has been a young lady for a dozen years and more."

"Wait. I have her down now. She must have been the girl Elvira, who used to drop into the bird store and who would at once be taken into the back room by Mother Centipede. That's it! She was Elvira. Great Scott! Sergius Shanks' wife? Now I can get even, sure."

"But you will please check your desires in that direction," said the detective.

"You will obey me."

"Obey you, Tracy. You're pretty cool."

"I may be, but your time may come by and by. You look like somebody, Gideon."

"I always did. We lay in the same cradle together and the neighbors used to drop in from far and near to take a squint at the Glare twins. Look alike? I guess so. I am in doubt to-day whether I am Gideon or Buck."

"Where is Buck?"

"Doing time somewhere, I guess. I haven't heard from him for some time. You see he was an expert, could pick the best lock ever made, and may have picked too many."

Tracy Trailer, the detective, pulled something from his pocket. He dropped it into Gideon Glare's hand. It was the gold ring found on the finger left in the Goldstone safe.

One look was enough. A wild cry came from the crook's throat.

"That's Buck's ring! I'd know it among a million. Where did you get it?"

"He left the ring and his finger in Sergius Shanks' safe."

"Then Buck is dead. Where did he live, Tracy? I must know that."

CHAPTER X. GIDEON GLARE.

Trailer, the detective, heard these words with an exulting thrill.

He had at last discovered the identity of the man with the mutilated hand.

Gideon Glare bent suddenly forward and caught his sleeve.

"Buck is dead! He would never have given up that ring alive. It was mother's and it fell to him. You know he is dead, and I am the last of the twins. Where did he live, Trailer? You can trust me, hated and sometimes hunted though I am."

The man of many trails watched the face before him for a full minute.

It was a good-looking face, and the more he watched it the more it looked like the face he had seen dead and cold in the little room opposite Nipsie Atom's window.

He told Gideon Glare all. He told him how the finger with the ring had been found behind the door of the steel safe, how he (the detective) had been strangely guided to the room in the tenement where the man with the maimed hand lay dead, and how he had afterward seen the body in the Morgue.

Gideon Glare listened to the narrative without a question. He was afraid to break in upon the detective's story for fear he would miss some of it and he

eagerly drank in every word while he sat with the whitest of faces on the edge of the lounge.

"Do you think Buck robbed the safe? Do you believe that he carried off that which was so dear to Sergius Shanks, leaving behind him thousands of dollars in hard cash and bonds which he might have had for the mere taking?" asked Gideon.

"The man who robbed the safe took nothing but the precious things in the steel drawer."

"What was taken, anyhow? Papers which carried the secret of a life? Or was it the old man's will?"

"Mrs. Shanks, who says that her husband is becoming childish, fancies that he was keeping in that secret drawer the story of his life."

"Does she say that, she, the Elvira of the Canal Street nest?"

Trailer nodded.

"The woman lies, Trailer. She knows what was in that drawer. She has been hoodwinking you. Is the old banker growing childish? He was a man of iron five years ago."

"You are right. He was accounted the best man of his age, physically, in the city."

"And now he is a wreck? Fudge! She tells you this, does she? If this be true, who made him a wreck? Who is his second wife and who is in league with her?"

Gideon Glare had risen to his feet and stood before the detective with a singular light in his eyes.

"Dare I go out and help you avenge Buck's death?" he cried. "Dare I take the trail in the light of day and follow it with you to the end? I am wanted in more than one place. I am the moth that has come back to the flame. I couldn't have remained away if I knew I had a legion of detectives like you at my heels. I am here! I am back in Gotham, which I left years ago, sworn up the river by Sergius Shanks, and for what?"

There was a contemptuous sneer on the man's thin lips and his face seemed to lose color.

"I'll go out if they are on every corner looking for me. Buck is dead and I am left alone. Buck wasn't straight, but he shall be avenged all the same. You tell me that he was found dead in the old rat's nest called the Castle Norway. I know where it is. I used to burrow there myself, and I know every room in it. It was on the third floor, you tell me."

"The third floor, Gideon."

"I know every room there. Which one had he?"

"The end one looking south."

"I know where it is. There used to be a little hole in the wall, don't know as it is there now, and I have often pressed the button which opened the sliding door."

"It is there yet, but it is empty."

"Then Buck, if he plundered the Goldstone Bank, was plundered in turn. He would hide his plunder in that hole if he knew it."

"What was on the other side of the room?" asked the ferret.

"A dark closet," was the prompt reply. "But don't you see, Buck was killed in the little room. A man doesn't die from a mutilated hand. That would have been but an incident in Buck Glare's life—but an incident, Trailer. He was hunted down by the man who hired him to rob the safe."

"Then you think he was but an accomplice."

"Nothing else. He would have taken more than the contents of the little drawer had he opened the safe on his own hook. What would he want with those papers? He could not have known about Sergius Shanks' past, and, then, I don't believe that those papers bore on his past life. He was some man's tool."

Gideon Glare was pacing the room like a caged tiger. Now and then he would throw a look toward the detective and now glance toward the door with blazing eyes.

"All New York and a thousand Sing Sings could not keep me from the trail!" he suddenly cried. "If you want to stop me, Tracy, you will have to take me in on some old charge—there's plenty of them, Heaven knows—and then you will have the trail to yourself. But I am out for blood, now!"

He went over to a hat that hung on a nail and jerked it down.

"Will you go with me, or do you prefer to be seen just now in better company?" he asked, looking at the detective.

"Sit down. I am not through with you yet."

Gideon, with another look, went sullenly back to the lounge and sat down, holding the slouch hat in his hand.

"What is it?"

"You don't want to flush the game, do you?"

"No; I want to kill it!"

He thrust out one of his long arms and made a motion as if clutching a human throat.

Then he came over to the detective and continued, in a hoarse whisper:

"What do you want me to do? Tell me. I am yours from this time on—yours and vengeance's. Command me, Tracy Traller. Shall I lie low, or shall I go out there and hunt with you?"

"You shall do both, Gideon. We can hunt together."

"You are not afraid to hunt with a criminal?"

"Afraid to hunt with you? Why should I be?"

"I make no promises. See? If I find the game first—if I run across the quarry first I might kill it in a spasm of rage."

"I'll trust you, Gideon."

"And I will try to keep my head, no matter how I am tested. I will remember you."

"Now," said Tracy Traller, looking at the man a moment. "I want to know one thing."

"Go ahead."

"Did this Miss Elvira have any kin? Of course she wasn't Mother Centipede's daughter."

"If she had any kin I never saw it. But I used to hear—I was told so one night in the nest by an old man who came there with the rest of us—that she had a half-brother whom no one ever saw. I give you this for what it is worth. A half-brother. I never set eyes on him and he never came to see Mother Centipede."

"The old bird-woman must have known all about their parentage?"

"Didn't she, though? She knows all about every person who ever passed the threshold of the little den beneath her store."

"What was made there?"

"I don't know what they make there now, but those days they made the prettiest rubies and topazes and emeralds you ever saw. You remember what a time they had when they found an old man lying dead in the street with a bag of rubies on his person?"

Well did the detective remember it, how it excited all New York, and brought out the fact that many a strand of rubies were paste.

"Well, the old man's rubies came from the nest. I don't know what they make there now."

"Nothing, I suppose, for the gem market is all right now," answered the detective. "But about this half-brother who always kept in the dark? She had one, Elvira had, eh?"

"I was told so. And this is the woman who to-day is Sergius Shanks' wife? I would like to see her. Where do they live?"

"On Madison Avenue, above the Square."

"Oh, that's easily found," grinned Gideon, as if making a mental note of it. "She was a pretty little thing then, with the blackest of eyes and a figure that was perfect. She must be pretty now."

"She is."

"Old Shanks' wife! And the old chap has been plundered by Buck and Buck is dead. Tracy, let me go out at once with

you. Don't cage me here a moment longer."

"You shall go out upon one condition."

"Name it and you shall have my promise."

"You shall not visit the Madison Avenue house."

"I will not. I am your slave, Tracy Traller. I am in your hands as plastic as the potter's clay."

"Come, then."

A few minutes later the detective might have been seen entering his own room, but Gideon Glare was not with him.

He had dropped the crook somewhere.

Let us see where.

A man who had a cat-like tread was passing up a long, narrow flight of steps toward the top of a tenement. It was Gideon Glare.

He was quite alone and his feet made but little noise, though the steps were not very secure.

He kept in the shadows as much as possible and at last stopped at a door already familiar to the reader.

He caught the catch nervously and pushed. The door swung open and the man let himself inside.

He was in the room where the man with the maimed hand had been found. There was no light in the place save a little streak which came in from the nearest window beyond the wall, and it showed the ex-jail-bird the dimensions of the room.

"So Buck got it here?" he said, in an undertone, as he paused in the middle of the apartment and looked around. "The detective says he found him lying here dead—killed by the person he had served. I know it."

Gideon Glare passed around the room. He found the button, because he knew where it was, and the next moment he had opened the sliding door.

The hole in the wall was empty. He put his hand in and felt of the emptiness.

"He may have put the papers in this hole or he may have hidden them elsewhere. Why not on his person? Or he may have given them to his master and then have suffered death to make the secret secure. We will know all this in time."

Gideon shut the door in the wall and went over to the dingy couch which rested against the wall.

He sat down and for a moment covered his hard face with his dark hands.

"I will, Buck, I will! There shall be vengeance for you. I will break my word with the detective. He had no right to bind me to spare the hand that took your life, Buck. I will break my word for the first time in my life. Mother in Heaven will approve of it. I will hunt down the slayer on my own hook and then I will tell Tracy Traller."

He sprang up and with a grasp of madness flung wide open the door and walked out with froth on his lips.

He passed down to the street below like a cyclone.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BAFFLED PURSUIT.

In the middle of a sumptuously furnished room sat a fair young girl who would have attracted attention anywhere.

She was alone. There was a soft glow in the rich parlor and the drapings of the curtains that half concealed the windows were of the loveliest.

At her feet lay a large dog, whose head rested upon the young girl's dainty slipper, and the animal's eye seemed to look up admiringly at his mistress. It was just dark.

The lights of Gotham had been lighted, and outside the house, which stood back of three wide stone steps, a lamp cast its light upon the smooth stones.

The name on the door-plate was that of Cook, and beneath this roof the cashier of the Goldstone Bank had his home.

Nina Cook, as she was called, was known as the cashier's sister, though she did not look one whit like him.

People who saw the two together,

which they did now and then in the park not far away, could hardly believe that they were so closely related, but there were none who questioned the relationship.

On this particular evening the beautiful girl was quite alone, the sole occupant of the house which she occupied with the cashier.

Now and then she heard noises in the street, the sound of human voices and the hum of cab wheels.

As the bell rang the girl started, and the dog roused himself with a sudden snarl.

It was not Cadmus, for he had a key and could let himself in at all hours, and when Nina crossed the carpet there came a flush to her cheeks.

In another moment she was greeting the man who came in and was escorting him back to the parlor. It was Harley Stafford.

Stafford, the young teller and the young girl's accepted lover, was pale and ill at ease.

Nina noticed this and rallied him, to which he said that he was not feeling at his best.

"The bank tragedy hasn't unnerved you, I trust?" said she. "Cadmus has told me the whole story, and while it is a very uncanny narrative, I'm sure, I found it interesting."

They were in the parlor by this time and Nina had resumed her seat.

"What has the detective discovered?" she asked. "Cadmus told me that one of the best in the city has taken charge of the case."

"Really, I can tell you nothing about what he has found out. I would like to forget the whole terrible occurrence."

"I don't doubt it, seeing that you were shocked with the rest by the discovery of the finger in the safe. It seems to me, Harley, that there ought to be found a trail. Some doctor evidently dressed the man's hand."

Stafford thought of his trip to the strange house with Tom Mattoon, and how they had looked in upon the wrong man.

"One would think so," he said, avoiding the fair girl's gaze.

"I wonder if the detective has thought of this?"

"They usually think of everything."

"That's their business. But I would have hunted up the nearest doctors at once. I told Cadmus so yesterday and he was of the same opinion."

"It's a good idea, and, if you wish it, I will mention it to our detective."

"You may, but don't let him know who made the suggestion. They don't like women to interfere with them, Cadmus says."

"I'll remember the injunction. If you have made the right suggestion and our traller follows it successfully, I will see that you get final credit."

"That will be time enough," answered the beautiful girl, with a blush. Then she added, after a moment:

"I have been down to call on Mrs. Shanks, or rather to ask after her husband's health. But he is not at home."

"Not at home?" exclaimed the teller, with a start. "Why, I understood that he was all broken up and needed rest."

"That is true, and rest he has just sought. But he is not seeking it in the city."

"Gone out of the city? Sergius Shanks?"

"Yes, sir; Carmen, the maid, told me at the house that Mrs. Shanks had taken him over to Jersey City to take the express for Philadelphia."

Stafford looked thunderstruck.

"When did you return from the house?"

"But half an hour ago. I had just got settled down when you rang. Cadmus will know more about it when he comes in. He may have gone across the river with them."

Stafford glanced at his watch.

He knew something about the night trains out of Jersey City.

"I would like to see Mr. Shanks before

he sets out. I have something of importance to communicate."

"Oh, he is off by this time."

"Not for thirty minutes yet. If I can make all connections and catch the ferry I can get there."

"But—"

"I must be off. Will be back in an hour, Nina."

Nina Cook saw that it would be useless to argue with her lover, and a minute later, having caught a passing cab, the young teller was being rushed toward the river.

His feelings as he settled back in the vehicle cannot be described.

Sergius Shanks gone out of town?

There was something about this that tingled every nerve. He fairly shuddered as he thought of it.

Never before did a cab go so slowly for him. He knew that the driver was trying to earn his money, and, holding his watch in his hand, to be consulted whenever they came to a cross street, he waited for the horses to stop at the ferry.

"Can't you go a little faster? Can't you fly?" cried Stafford to the man on the box.

"Wish I could, gov'nor," was the reply.

"It's a V if I catch the boat."

"You'll catch it, then!"

And he did.

As the carriage came to a dead halt Stafford jerked open the door and sprang out to see the boat casting off its moorings. He thrust the bill into the Jehu's hand and bounded toward the wharf.

He landed on the boat by a great leap, which was applauded as it deserved to be, for it was a desperate undertaking, and then he went forward.

Stafford gnawed the file of impatience all the way across the river.

Would he get there in time to see whether Sergius Shanks had actually left the city? A few minutes would decide.

At the Jersey wharf he made another leap and ran up into the depot.

He heard the night express for Philadelphia called as he entered the shed and saw the passengers flocking through the iron gates.

In vain did he look for Sergius Shanks and his wife.

Biting his lips with disappointment, the young teller waited for the train to pull out.

"She will come back through the gate if she has seen him on the train," thought he, withdrawing to a bench where he could watch. "I will see if she comes."

A few came back. Stafford watched them all.

He looked in vain for Winnie Shanks and at last he rose to go back to New York.

He had had a trip for his pains and his nerves were a little unstrung.

"Carmen may have deceived Nina. She may have acted under instructions, and Nina is not very suspicious."

He was making his way toward the boat when he was greeted with a laugh, at sound of which he turned like one stung by a serpent.

He knew that laugh, had heard it once in the bank, and the moment he turned he found the laughter, Winnie Shanks.

There she stood, leaning on the arm of Cadmus Cook, the cashier, who was laughing with her over something that seemed to give mutual pleasure.

But all at once the laugh ceased, for, though Stafford tried to slink back to the shadows, he had been seen.

The banker's wife had caught sight of him and all color had vanished from her face.

"Mr. Stafford, are you a night bird, too?" she exclaimed, coming toward him, while Cook's face flushed deeply. "We have just started my husband to Philadelphia for a little rest and were going back on the ferry."

"I came over to see Mr. Shanks," said Stafford. "But I have been too late."

"I trust he will not be gone long, and your information will keep, won't it?"

Stafford, without explaining what it was, hoped it would.

He was watched like a serpent by the white-faced creature who had disengaged herself from Cook's arm and who looked ready to slay him if a glance could have done so.

All three went down to the boat together and seated themselves side by side.

Scarcely a word passed between them on the trip over and when they landed Cook pressed close to Stafford and said:

"Meet me in an hour at the Eldorado. You know where that is. I have news."

Stafford nodded and saw the cashier hand Mrs. Shanks into a carriage.

"There's something wrong here," said the teller to himself. "I don't more than half believe that the president went to the Quaker City."

Then he began to wonder what Cook had to communicate at the Eldorado, and started off to keep the appointment.

An hour is not a long space of time, but that night it seemed longer than common to Stafford.

The Eldorado was a fashionable place in the center of the city, with plenty of privacy, and there the young teller waited for the cashier.

Would Cook come? Would he keep the appointment, or had he merely sent him thither for the purpose of getting rid of him?

At the end of an hour or thereabouts Cadmus Cook entered the brilliantly lighted place. His roving eye sought out the teller and found him waiting for him.

"This way," he said, in lowered tones to Stafford, and they moved into one of the private stalls.

Cook's face was still a little flushed. He looked across the table at Stafford and seemed to take a long breath.

"I think I am on the track of the missing papers," said he.

"Oh, the president lost something, then? It was not altogether a delusion."

"He lost a few papers which his fears urged him to keep under lock and key. Now, if we could get hold of them and restore them without any publicity, Stafford, we'd be feathering our own nests nicely."

"Then you have seen the detective lately?"

"Not since yesterday. But I don't care about seeing him. I want to find those papers myself, and I want you to share in the glory of the coup."

Stafford looked across the table into the cashier's face.

"The person who stole these documents is known to me. Indeed, I have been doing a little detective work myself, and with your assistance I can lay hands on him within three hours."

There was no reply.

The cashier's eyes seemed to glitter. They never looked so before.

"Will you help me?" he asked.

Stafford did not speak.

For the first time in his life he feared the man. Cadmus Cook was dangerous.

CHAPTER XII.

DARK WORK.

"Did any one call, Carmen?"

"No one but Mr. Cook's sister."

"When was she here?"

"A few minutes after you went out."

Winnie Shanks passed into the parlor, where she threw off her wraps and sat down.

She had come home from the night trip across the river and was alternately flushed and pale. Perhaps her unexpected encounter with Stafford in the depot accounted for her palor and flushes, but at any rate she was ill at ease.

Carmen, the maid, who had the figure of a giantess, retired, and the banker's wife heard her on the stairs.

In another instant the woman slipped from the parlor and entered a small room across the hall. This was the library of the mansion, and there were books galore. Sergius Shanks was a man of considerable learning and there were times when he cared for books more than for the bank.

Winnie passed to one of the cases, the

glass door of which she slid to one side, and began to take down some volumes.

She selected the books with considerable care, and after doing so carried them from the library.

"Carmen," she called, and the tall maid came back.

"How has he been?" she asked.

"Quiet enough, with one or two exceptions."

"Not furious?"

"No, just enough to worry me a little," smiled the maid.

"You will help me, Carmen, but first of all you must be sworn to secrecy."

"I'm ready."

Carmen came forward and stopped in front of the banker's wife.

"You understand, Carmen, that Mr. Shanks shows signs of insanity, and I do not like the odium of incarcerating him in a public asylum. I have thought best, therefore, to put him in another place where he will receive good treatment, and where he will not be exposed to scenes that might tend to irritate him."

The listening girl nodded.

"Therefore, you solemnly swear, Carmen, to do my bidding and never to reveal what you see or do so long as you live?"

"I swear," was the reply.

"There is a terrible penalty attached to the violation of an oath in this world as well as in the next."

"Yes, yes."

"Should you break yours, girl, your life won't be worth the snap of a finger, and I, with all my wealth, will be powerless to save you. I must have a little assistance in this matter, for it is a delicate affair, and I know of no one whom I can trust as I can you, Carmen."

The tall girl appeared flattered, but at the same time her face was pale and her lips twitched.

She took the oath and then waited for Mrs. Shanks to proceed.

"We will go at midnight. It lacks an hour, yet. You will hold yourself in readiness, for you will be needed then. I have Jansen to assist me, though I don't think he will give us any trouble. It will be a long ride through the streets, but all will go well. You are not afraid, Carmen?"

Carmen said "no," though she did not know but that even then she was very much afraid.

The maid retired and Mrs. Shanks slipped up-stairs.

There she listened at a door and smiled when she heard the regular breathing of a sleeper beyond the portal.

"He's all right yet. We played it pretty well to-night and would have got along without a disturbing incident but for the presence of Stafford in the depot. What did he want with him? What was it he wanted to communicate, or was it all a ruse to see if we had him across the river? You must not pry too deeply into my affairs, Harley Stafford. You might lose—no, not your position—but something of vaster importance to you."

She laughed lightly at the end of the sentence and drew away from the door.

Half an hour later she came back and softly unlocked the portal.

Carmen was with her now.

Winnie stepped into the room, which was dimly revealed by a jet turned low and approached a bed.

The banker was there, apparently in a deep sleep, and his wife bent over him.

Carmen stood guard at the door.

It was noticed that Sergius Shanks was fully dressed and that he looked pale and haggard.

Winnie roused her husband, who sat up and then slipped from the couch.

"We are going out," said the woman.

"Isn't it night?" asked the banker, seeing the light and Carmen at the door.

"Yes, but what of that?"

"Are you going to take me to the detective?"

"Yes, Sergius."

"At last! How kind you are, Winnie. I want to tell the detective something that will help him on the trail."

"Of course. You shall be with him before long."

Sergius Shanks offered no opposition; he put on his thin overcoat and let his wife draw the collar up around his face.

"We don't want the enemy to see us," said Winnie, as she pulled a soft slouch hat down over her husband's brow. "We must have a little secrecy."

"That's right. Will Jansen drive us?"

"Of course. You are willing to trust Jansen?"

"With my very life!" smiled Sergius Shanks, and the next moment he was going down-stairs between the two women.

They passed from the house to a carriage through the shadows of midnight.

Sergius Shanks settled back in one corner with a sigh of relief.

He seemed to think that all was right, and treachery did not enter his head.

The carriage moved away with his wife beside him and Carmen on the opposite seat.

The face of the maid was pale, and now and then she glanced toward the window of the vehicle as a gleam of light for a moment invaded it.

"Is he waiting for me?" asked Sergius Shanks, always thinking of Trailer, the Ferret.

"He is waiting," said Winnie.

After a long drive, though the rig went rapidly over the stones of various streets, its speed lessened and at last it drew toward the buildings.

Mrs. Shanks raised the curtain at the window and glanced out.

They were not in the best quarter of the city. The buildings, while tall and business-like, were not the elegant ones to be found on Broadway, nor were the streets so well paved.

"Are we there?" asked the banker.

"Nearly so," was the reply, and then Winnie rose and put her lips close to the little glass in front of the carriage.

"Drive up close, Jansen," she said.

The wheels creaked on the stones of the gutter and then went close to the curbing.

Winnie Shanks made a motion toward Carmen, who seemed to understand, for she leaned forward and caught hold of the banker's arm.

In another minute the slouch hat was pulled over the white face and at the same time Winnie whispered:

"This is a critical time. If the enemy sees us all is lost."

"Don't let them see us," answered the old man, ducking his head as the cab door opened.

He stepped out upon the sidewalk with Carmen on one side of him and his wife on the other.

He glanced up at the house which they approached.

"Where are we?" he exclaimed, for the first time seemingly suspicious of foul play.

"Almost there," responded his wife.

"Quick, Carmen, across the sidewalk now."

The two women hustled Sergius Shanks toward the building and in another second a little side door opened.

The banker drew back. He threw up his hand and nearly knocked off the slouch hat, but Carmen's hand quickly readjusted it and the banker was shoved beyond the door, which closed instantly.

He was pushed along a semi-lighted way to the head of a flight of steps which seemed to lead into the bowels of the earth, and there he resisted.

"Treachery! Treason!" he cried.

But Carmen threw her great white hand over his mouth and he was almost thrown headlong down the steps.

"Quick, Carmen, Vilola," cried Mrs. Shanks. "We must get him down there as soon as possible."

Banker Shanks went on to the bottom of the staircase, and then a door opened.

He was pushed forward again and Carmen laughed.

"It took work," she said, turning to her mistress, who was talking to the short, fat Italian-looking creature who had opened the door to them.

"Yes, but it was well done. Vilola will see that he doesn't want for anything."

The fat woman nodded and Carmen was glad to get out of the little underground place where the air was foul.

Winnie remained behind to converse in low tones with the jaileress, and Carmen went up and sat in the carriage.

All at once the maid started back and uttered a shriek.

The cab door had been opened from the outside and a face thrust toward her.

At first she thought that her mistress was about to join her, but when she saw that the face was a man's, dark, cadaverous and searing, she fell back into the furthest corner with a cry.

It did not remain there long, but the door was pulled to with a snap, for Jansen had called to the intruder and he sloped off down the pavement.

Carmen was all in a shiver when Winnie came back to the carriage.

"What was the face like?" asked the banker's wife.

"It was a devil's face—I know it was."

"But a man's, all the same—the face of some hungry night rat, perhaps."

"Why, the eyes glared at me as though they would pierce me through and through and—"

"All right, Jansen. Drive back."

Away went the carriage once more and Winnie Shanks, pleased with her game, leaned back and enjoyed thoughts of her dastardly coup.

Carmen said nothing all the way home, and the moment she had entered her room on the third floor of the Shanks domicile she threw up her hands and sank into a chair.

"What have I done?" she cried aloud. "In the name of Heaven, what crime have I committed to-night? What will they do with him in that underground place and what does it all mean? I dare not tell. I am oath-bound. I have sworn to keep the terrible secret, and if he is found dead there or elsewhere, perhaps in the river, what will become of guilty me?"

She shivered with remorse and buried her face in her hands.

"We will be found out. I know it. There was that face I saw. I know he saw me and he may have been on the watch. That face! I will see it again—I know it."

Yes, Carmen, you will see that long, dark, cadaverous face once more in your life; you will see it under different circumstances, and you will have a better look into the keen, glaring eyes.

As for the banker's wife, she retired to her own room and went to bed.

There had been no trip to Philadelphia; the journey across the river was all a blind to cover up another crime, and the secrecy of the last move was held in the breasts of three persons.

The next day it was known at the Goldstone Bank that the president had gone out of town to recruit his shattered health, and it was given out by Cadmus Cook that he might be gone some days, but that he would be kept informed as to the business of the institution.

Did all believe this?

Did Harley Stafford, as he went to his desk that morning, take down this story with all allowance? He had crossed the river on the trail of the plotters; he had seen Mrs. Shanks and the cashier in the depot and afterward had held conversation with Cook at the Eldorado.

Perhaps he believed, and perhaps he did not. He said nothing, but went to work.

Noon came and he was still there. He remained till the safes were locked for the day, and then as he stepped from the bank he was touched on the sleeve by a man whom he did not recognize.

The gentleman was in plain clothes.

"Mr. Stafford, I believe?"

The teller bowed.

"You will accompany me. I am an officer."

Stafford drew back with a deep flush upon his face.

"You are charged with conspiracy to rob the Goldstone Bank."

The accusation took Stafford's breath.

CHAPTER XIII.

CENTIPEDE GIVES UP A SECRET.

There was one thing of which Detective Trailer made a strong note, and this was his last talk with Gideon Glare, the man found in the house to which Tom Mattoon had taken the teller of the Goldstone Bank.

This man had let in a little light upon Mrs. Shanks' girlhood days, and if she was Elvira, of the old bird-house, Trailer resolved to know it.

After separating from Glare he went toward the place, and brought up in front of the establishment.

He heard the chirping of the birds, and now and then a tune from the linnets which persisted in singing in the darkness that infested the store.

Mother Centipede had ceased business for the day and had locked the store.

She had retired to the mysteries of the little upper room which she inhabited, and was not to be disturbed by any one.

Detective Trailer had an open-sesame to the place which even Mother Centipede could not resist, and after rapping loudly at the front door a window overhead was raised and he caught sight of the dark, Italian-like face of the woman.

"I no sell birda at night. Coma to-morrow," said Mother Centipede.

"I'm not bird-hunting just now. I want to see you."

"Personally?"

"Of course."

The window was shut down, and in another moment there were footsteps in the store, and then the door opened.

Detective Trailer stepped inside, and was guided down the bird-lined aisle to the little back room which began where the sales-room ended.

Mother Centipede lighted a lamp and set it on a box, then motioned her visitor to take another.

She recognized him as a customer to whom she had recently sold a Hartz canary, and waited for him to make known his errand.

"I'm looking for a person who, some years ago, used to drop in here as a little girl."

The woman, interested at once, as her start showed, shook her head.

"Me forgetta," said she.

"I shouldn't think you would forget so beautiful a child," said the detective. "She came here often enough, and seemed to have the run of the house."

"Me forgetta altogether," said Mother Centipede, in reply, and her manner was quite positive.

He knew the creature was lying, her manner told him this, and he was not surprised.

"I think you used to call her Elvira," said he.

Still Mother Centipede insisted that she could not remember a little girl by that name, and Detective Trailer hastened to refresh her memory.

"She was a pretty child, and you used to let her wait on customers, for even then you sold birds."

"Oh," suddenly cried the woman, as if driven to the wall, and was very anxious to get out of the predicament. "I remember her now. Yes, yes! Elvira, the little one who died in the hospital from being run over by a hack."

"She died, did she?"

"Run over." Mother Centipede seemed to forget her brogue and had come down to plain English.

"I'm very sorry. I had news for the little one if she were living now. She would be a young lady pretty well along in years, for it must have been fifteen years since she used to come here and help you."

"Bouta fifteen," was the reply.

"What became of the little one's cousin?" asked Trailer.

Mother Centipede shook her head.

"Had none, eh? I always thought there were two of them, for sometimes Elvira talked about her cousin."

The old woman started and walked to the end of the little room.

There she suddenly placed one ear against the board wall and listened, now and then stealing a glance at her visitor.

"Is some person out there?" asked Trailer.

Mother Centipede held up a warning hand.

"Do you have listeners? Doesn't that door lead into the back yard?"

"Yes."

The Gotham detective went toward it and laid his hand on the iron bolt.

But the following minute, with a suppressed cry, the woman bounded forward and her dark hand clutched his wrist.

"Knifa out there, maybe. No go outa in the dark."

"But I don't want listeners about me. I'm here on business, and no one shall play eavesdropper."

He shoved back the bolt and opened the door despite the woman's protestations.

The night beyond the door was dark enough, and he looked in vain for a human form.

No one was out there that he could see, and at last he came back to the woman.

"Shuta door," said Mother Centipede, who was pale and almost breathless. "Tell me why you wanta to know abouta Elvira."

She was the questioner now. He had excited the woman's curiosity, and he was satisfied.

"I can make her rich."

"How?"

"You must tell me the truth first."

"'Bouta Elvira?"

"Yes, but if she is dead, if she was run over by a hack and afterward died in the hospital, why—"

"Waita!" cried Mother Centipede, bounding from the room and leaving her caller alone.

Trailer heard her footsteps a moment in the bird-store, and then seemed to catch them as they went up creaking stairs.

She came back with excitement in her eyes and something in her hand.

It was a daguerreotype, and she placed it in the detective's grasp with a glance of triumph.

"Elvira's picture," said Mother Centipede.

The eager detective leaned toward the light and looked at the face in his hands.

It was the face of a beautiful child of twelve or thirteen, and the eyes were large, lustrous, and expressive. The face was framed in a mass of curls, such as children of that age sometimes wear, and the hands, which were folded, child-like, in the lap, were white and delicate.

"So this is little Elvira?" he said, looking up.

"That is Pitti."

"So she had two names?"

"Pitti nickname. We call her Pitti half the time."

"Was she your child, Vilola?"

"No!" with a start. "Me no call her mine. I no know whose child she was."

"But you let her come here and sell birds for you?"

"She was like a bird herself. Could sing like the Hartz canaries, or like the English skylarks."

Detective Trailer handed the picture back, saying:

"If she is dead, why, I am at the end of the game. The money will have to go elsewhere."

"How mucha?" asked Mother Centipede.

"Oh, a matter of two hundred thousand."

The woman threw up her hands in amazement.

"One-third to you, Mother Centipede, if you could produce the child or tell me where she is."

Instantly there came to the bird-seller's face a look that amused the ferret.

Mother Centipede had played the wrong hand, and the cards had been thrown down a few moments too soon.

She looked confused and disappointed.

"You saw Elvira buried I suppose," said Trailer.

"No."

"But the hack finished her, all the same?"

"It was said so. I was told that Elvira died in the hospital. I no know it to be true."

"But she didn't come here after the accident?"

The woman gave the detective a long look.

"Who are you?"

She leaned forward and looked the ferret squarely in the face.

Her eyes glittered. Her bosom rose and fell with illy-suppressed excitement, and she remained silent while she watched him.

"Officer?" she asked at last.

Trailer shook his head.

"Lawyer," he answered, just as sententiously.

"What name?"

"Jonas Chubb. Office on Bowery, near Grand."

Mother Centipede seemed to digest this information slowly. She was suspicious.

"Me see you to-morrow," said she.

"I go away to-morrow, early in the morning. May be away for a year. My office will be locked up."

The tide had turned. The bird-seller, greedy and avaricious, did not want this golden goose to escape from her clutches. She must tell the truth, or lose the prize. She saw this.

"Me thoughta you officer. Me heara you say that you wanta Elvira, and it scared me. She no dead. It is one of Mother Centipede's little stories."

"You must be careful how you spin such yarns," said Trailer. "It may be the unmaking of you. Think of the one-third of two hundred thousand. It would fill your pocket, and you need not sell birds any more."

The dark eyes grew brighter. The woman seemed to breathe hard.

"You can tell me to-night, or not at all," continued Trailer. "To-morrow I will be gone."

Mother Centipede went over to the wall again and put her ear to it as before.

She was careful, was this woman, whose reputation was none of the best. There were few who knew that she led a double life, and that besides being a bird-seller, she was a "fence," with many secrets and a dark past.

Trailer, the shadower, watched her narrowly while she hugged the wall, listening intently.

By and by she came back.

"Me tella truth now. One-third, you say?"

Trailer nodded.

"I keep my part of the bargain. One-third of two hundred for the truth about your little friend of years ago—for information of your little bird-seller, Pitti."

"She is alive; she is rich already," said the woman.

"How rich? You didn't make her rich, Vilola?"

"Me no give her anything, but her face was her fortune."

"I see. She grew up, eh?"

"Yes, she grew up pretty, did my little Pitti."

"And captured a rich husband. Just the thing for her to do, you see."

"She catcha him. She knowa how, with her black eyes and cunning ways."

"Well, where is she now?"

"Up-town. Me no visit her, but all same I hear from her now and then."

"She is able to buy birds of you now, Mother Centipede?"

"She pays for what she gets here. Her husband is a great man—runs a bank in the Walla Street."

"Oh, you don't say that?"

"It is true. Pitti is now Mrs. Shanks—Witch Winnie she is called sometimes."

Detective Trailer heard a noise outside, and was certain he had caught the sound of a stealthy step.

Some one—a spy, no doubt—was out there.

Mother Centipede heard it too, but she did not move.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN WITH A SECRET TO SELL.

There was a spy outside the house.

If the detective had caught sight of this man crouching in the darkness, he would have seen a slim figure wedged in among the shadows with a keen ear on the alert.

Perhaps Mother Centipede had placed the man on guard; he might have been the Stacy of the bird-store, with whom Trailer had already held an interview, or he might have been another person.

At any rate, there was a man among the shadows.

When the detective had quitted the little back room Mother Centipede opened the door and looked out.

She made a strange sound, at which there was a shuffling of feet among the rubbish of the back yard and a man slouched forward.

In another moment he was in the little den looking at the fat, round face of the bird-seller, whose deep-set eyes glowed like gems.

"Where is he?" asked the man.

"Gone!" said the woman. "You heard him. You know what he was after. We can become rich."

"I heard all. And so you believed him? You take stock in what he said, that he wants to find this woman—your little Elvira of other years. He has wormed the secret out of you and you will get nothing for your pains."

The look he got from the woman was a blank stare, at which he grinned, showing his yellow teeth.

"He is going away to-morrow."

"It's all fudge. You believe that he is a lawyer of the Bowery, that he is—what did he call himself—Jonas Chubb?"

"That was the name."

"Well, there's no such man. I tell you you were giving the secret away to a detective."

The woman seemed to gasp, and for half a second she stood silent and breathless.

"I can't believe that. Why didn't you signal me?"

"I wanted to see how far he would hoodwink you. I didn't think you would go as far with him as you did. Don't you know that Elvira is a better pigeon than we ever can get by serving that man? You had to tell him that she was the banker's wife."

Mother Centipede said nothing.

"You even told him that her name was Pitti then. You will get no more golden nest eggs from Elvira now."

"I will go to the river and drown myself."

"Fudge! You will do nothing of the kind. You have been indiscreet, that's all. There's a way out of it. If we act promptly we can yet recall the act. He won't try to see Elvira till to-morrow, at any rate. She is to come here to-night, eh?"

"Yes."

"She is to bring her husband here?"

"That's the bargain."

"You need not post her. That would frighten her. Keep a still tongue in your head. I will look after this cunning detective."

"Thank Heaven! When will you do it?"

"Now."

The hands of Mother Centipede pushed the man toward the door.

"Come. Don't be quite so rough with me," howled the man. "You want to get rid of me mighty quick. I'll see him later on to-night if I can."

"You know what to do. If we betray Elvira we lose the golden egg. What a fool I was, but that offer dazed me."

"I could tell that from the way you talked to him. You lied all right at first, but when you thought there was money in the truth you came back to it."

Mother Centipede tried to laugh, but the attempt was a failure.

She pushed the man who was the tallest into the darkness beyond the door, and, without giving him another word, shut it in his face.

"Tell me that he won't bother us when you come again," said she.

"Won't I, though?"

Mother Centipede, still cursing herself in no elegant language, ascended to the upper room, where she retired amid the chatter of a magpie whose slumbers she had disturbed.

As for the man she had so summarily dismissed, he went out upon the street and hurried away.

There was a quickness about his step which told that he was anxious to reach a certain point within a given time and to this end he seemed to bend every energy.

He did not pause until he ran up a flight of three steps and jerked a bell.

For several seconds he waited for a response and then he heard footsteps in the hall.

The door opened, displaying the face of Cadmus Cook, cashier of the Goldstone Bank.

The cashier was surprised to see the man on the step, but he held the door open and the fellow stepped inside.

Cadmus led the way to the parlor, where a light shone, and shut the door behind them.

The stranger, who had a fair-looking face, but a low brow and hazel eyes, took a chair and looked at the cashier.

"It's rather late for a call," said he, "but necessity knows no law, they say."

"What is it?"

The other one leaned back and glanced at a box of cigars which encumbered the center stand, and at last leaned forward and lifted one.

"You don't care, eh?" he remarked, striking a match. "I haven't enjoyed a really good cigar for some time and, with your permission, I'll just try one of these."

"That's all right," said Cadmus, a little nervously, while he narrowly watched his cool caller.

The man blew several white rings ceilingward and then took the Habana from his mouth.

"See here. What will you give me for a secret?"

"What's that? What will I give you for a secret?"

"Certainly."

"I don't deal in such things. I guess you have brought your wares to the wrong market."

"Didn't think I had, else I wouldn't have pulled your bell. I can tell you something."

"You're full of knowledge, I suppose," answered Cadmus, in a sneering way.

"That's what I am. Well, if you don't care to purchase, I can go where I can sell."

The cashier's visitor rose and walked, coolly smoking, toward the door.

"Come back and sit down. You seem to be anxious to sell what you can. Now I will listen to you. What sort of a secret have you got?"

"One which may affect you, or at least one that certainly concerns a friend of yours."

"I don't understand you."

The man, who had not announced his name, seemed to get out of patience.

"Oh, thunder!" he cried, getting up and coming over to Cook's chair. "Let's stop all this parleying. I'll tell you. Cadmus Cook, I know something about that bank crime. I can tell you something that will put some person on her guard."

The cashier did not move nor lose color. He looked the man calmly in the eye and waited for him to go on.

"The detectives are at work. They have struck the trail and nothing but a cool play and a quick one can save the guilty. I don't throw out any insinuations. I only say that if the guilty don't act at once the jig is up. I'll sell out to you."

In another instant the cashier's face grew red and then as suddenly whitened. "You think you can blackmail me, don't you?" he exclaimed. "I won't suffer it."

"All right, captain. You don't have to do anything. I know what I'm about, and if you don't care to negotiate with Tom Mattoon, why, you can just declare all things off. I'm satisfied. There's another market."

For the third time the man moved toward the door with his hat on.

Cadmus moved over to a desk in one corner of the room and stopped there.

"You don't seem to realize to whom you have brought your alleged secret."

"I came thither with my peepers open."

"You don't seem to know that at this time and in this house your worthless life isn't worth the flicker of a taper."

"Don't I? Well, you don't seem to realize that you are in a net whose meshes never let a human fish out."

The white-faced cashier said nothing, but, jerking a revolver from the open desk, he covered the man, who seemed to increase in stature, while he looked into the threatening muzzle.

"Blaze away," said Mattoon, coolly. "A fool always breaks his neck if you give him enough rope."

The hand of the cashier did not quiver and the gaslight fell upon the motionless weapon.

"Now, sir, you will tell me what you wanted to sell me, or I will land you dead against the wall behind you!" hissed Cadmus.

"Eh? You will do all this and thus bring about the earthquake a little ahead of time? You can press the trigger just as soon as it suits you."

The cashier looked over the barrel into the cool face of the man at the wall.

"You won't get the secret by threats, and the moment I fall dead at the muzzle of your gun, that moment the hammer will drop."

The next moment there came down the stairs in the hall the patter of feet, and Cook, glancing toward the door, showed that he expected it to open at any moment.

Nina was out there; he felt it.

All at once he lowered the revolver and sprang forward, but he was too late to shut her out, for the door was thrown open and the beautiful girl was in full view.

"This is the beauty of the house," grinned Tom Mattoon. "Can't say that she looks like you in the least, Cadmus. She is your sister, eh? Say, why can't you play fair toward the girl?"

Nina's look was already a stare, and her face was devoid of color. She looked first at Cadmus, and then turned slowly upon the man across the room.

"Who is this man, Cadmus?" she asked.

"Mattoon, according to his story."

"What did he say about your deceiving me? What does he mean?"

"He pretends that he has a secret to sell, and he has invaded this house with his wares. We don't buy secrets, eh, Nina?"

"No, Cadmus."

"All right," said Tom Mattoon. "Then these negotiations will come at once to an end. I'll go elsewhere."

He opened the door, and, brushing Nina Cook, suddenly caught her arm and pulled her toward him.

She resisted, but his hand held her fast, and the following moment he had placed his lips close to her ear.

What he said Cadmus Cook did not hear, but he heard the fair girl gasp, and when Tom Mattoon released her she staggered away with a cry.

"Villain! what have you done?" cried the cashier, dashing forward and suddenly covering the man with the cocked weapon. "Tell me the truth or you are a dead man."

"I am, am I? I guess not, Mr. Cook, so-called. I only told her the truth, that's all. And, curse you, if you press that trigger the hammer will fall and crush you, despite all your cunning and rascality."

The weapon fell and the door opened.

As Nina tottered across the carpet and sank into a chair there was the quick step of a man in the hall, the street door opened and shut and Tom Mattoon was gone.

"Oh, Cadmus, Cadmus, it must have been a lie. He told me—no, no! I cannot believe the horrible story!" cried Nina Cook.

CHAPTER XV.

POOR CARMEN.

The news of Hawley Stafford's arrest for conspiracy created the most profound

sensation in banking circles the next day.

At the Goldstone the excitement was most intense, and Cook was besieged for particulars.

Stafford had spent some time in the station house, but friends had bailed him out and he was supposed to be at his rooms.

The Inspector of Police had sent for Detective Trailer, to whom he had said:

"There seems to be something very mysterious about this arrest of the young teller of the Goldstone Bank. It was affected by Dashaway, one of our reliable men, but as yet he refuses to tell from whom he got his pointers. Dashaway is a man who has made few mistakes, and it is the desire of the department that you proceed at once to sift this thing to the bottom. We have caused inquiry to be made into Stafford's character, and it is of the best. True, the robbery of the bank is shrouded in mystery since the dead man with the missing finger was found in Castle Norway, and there seems to be but little light at hand. You will take the trail with your usual vim and we shall look for quick work and sure."

The dare-devil detective bowed his way from the cozy little office in Mulberry Street and walked away.

He went straight to Stafford's rooms.

The teller had sent word to the bank that he would not attempt to resume his old position till he had cleared himself from all dark charges, and another had been put into his place.

But Trailer did not find the young man at home, and Lucy, the maid, had to say that he had locked the door upon coming home perturbed and had quietly left the house.

A thorough search of the city failed to reveal the teller and Tracy Trailer turned to other scenes.

When night came again he might have been seen seated on a bench in Madison Square Park.

The detective was quite alone, but he was watching a woman who occupied a bench not far away.

He had been watching her for half an hour and had noticed that she kept her gaze fixed upon a certain corner of the park, as if she expected to see some one enter from that side.

By and by there came forward a man who walked rapidly and threw a searching look right and left.

He caught sight of the woman almost as soon as she saw him and in another moment he had stopped in front of her.

Both walked off together and the detective rose and followed them.

The woman he knew was Carmen, the housemaid attached to Sergius Shanks' house, and the girl who had accompanied Mrs. Shanks to the place where she had imprisoned her husband.

The pair turned into a street which crossed Madison Avenue and entered a house without knocking.

Detective Trailer approached the door and noticed the number.

He had barely passed the place when the door opened and he was being watched from the step.

The watcher was the man whom he had dogged to the house and in a few seconds footsteps came toward him.

Detective Trailer came back.

"Well, Gideon, you caught her, I see," he said.

"You see, captain, I am playing a little game of my own and you want to interfere."

"Not at all. That was Carmen, wasn't it?"

"Carmen, the tall angel of Shankdom," grinned the crook. "I am at work helping you. Come back with me. You shall see her."

Trailer went back and the two entered the house.

"Carmen is a giantess, but she has no nerves just now. You can get the whole secret out of her," whispered Gideon.

In a semi-darkened room in the house sat Carmen, Winnie's maid, waiting for Gideon Glare to come back.

She was nervous. She glanced toward

the door and now and then seemed to gasp.

"Here, Carmen, I want to introduce you to a friend of mine," said Gideon, as he advanced into the room with the detective at his heels. "You may have seen him before—"

There was a sharp cry and Carmen was on her feet.

She remembered Trailer's call at the house when he was not permitted to see Sergius Shanks, and now she feared that she had been decoyed into a trap.

"Upon my honor, I did not expect to bring him to you till a minute ago," said Gideon. "I happened to run across him on the street. You seem to know him, girl."

"I do. It is the detective in the case."

Tracy Trailer sat down beside Carmen, who had resumed her seat.

"I see through the whole dread thing," cried the maid. "You two men want to get me into your meshes. You want to make a traitress of me. I will not speak. I cannot. I am oath-bound!"

"Oath-bound?" echoed Gideon Glare. "Come, Carmen, there was a time when you would have broken the most binding oath for me, but now you refuse to tell me anything."

"But I cannot. I am sworn to secrecy."

"Very well, Carmen. Then I will leave you with this man."

"With this man-hunter, you mean?"

"Precisely."

"But I will not remain."

She sprang up and pushed Gideon half way across the room.

"You shall not keep me here. I did not know that you intended to face me with this tracker of human beings, and I will not be detained. Not even by you, Gideon Glare!"

If Carmen had lost some of her nerve since entering the house, she had enough now.

She was armed with the courage and strength of a tigress and her eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

"I will not tell him a word and I know a good deal. I will not be forced to betray my friends and I will not be kept in this place."

The detective waved his hand and prevented Gideon from speaking.

"Let the young lady have her way," said he. "We don't want to force her to talk, and she need not betray any one."

"You talk nice, but I understand you," cried Carmen, looking at Detective Trailer. "You are the man who is in my mistress's employ and I know you. You want to know who robbed the bank and left his finger in the safe. You want to know what was stolen, don't you? Well, go and ask the man who committed the crime."

Carmen was getting a little bolder and her bosom rose and fell with excitement.

"How is your master now?" queried the detective.

"Oh, he's a little better."

"Keeps his room all the time, does he, Carmen?"

"Yes."

"But I heard—I can't say who told me—that he isn't in the city at this time. He has gone abroad for his nerves."

There was no reply to this and the lips of the listening girl seemed to come together with a strange emphasis.

"Mrs. Shanks is very attentive to her husband, eh, Carmen?" said Trailer, continuing.

"Why shouldn't she be? Winnie Shanks is a woman with a heart—"

"And a purse," put in Gideon, with one of his grins. "By the way, Carmen, what did you ever do with that knife I gave you the last time we were together?"

There was a short, strange cry on the tall maid's part, and she lost color.

"You told me, you recollect, that, sooner than betray me, you would take your own life with it, but there wasn't a drop of blood on the blade after you set the trail dogs after me."

"It is false, Gideon Glare! I never told them where you hid."

"Never mind that, Carmen. I don't care to rake up old weeds. It's all right, I say. You want to go home now, don't you?"

"If you are through with me, yes. I've been away too long already."

"You can go, Carmen."

She gave Gideon Glare a long look and opened the door.

Into the hall she stepped and pulled her veil over her face.

"She'll not go home. Far from it," cried Gideon, clutching at the detective's sleeve. "She'll be lucky if she sees the Shanks mansion again to-night. Follow her."

Carmen had already slipped out into the street and her figure was seen in the light some distance from the house.

Detective Trailer was at the door and then down upon the sidewalk.

Carmen was still in sight.

In a little while he was after the maid, and, keeping her in sight, was enabled to track her up one street and down another.

She was not hard to see, and, as there were few people abroad in that particular part of the city, he had a light job.

Carmen kept her veil well pulled down. She now and then looked over her shoulder, but did not catch sight of the gliding figure of the sterling man-hunter.

On, on went Carmen, all the time further and further from the elegant home of the Shanks. She stopped at last.

She was at the little side-door connected with Mother Centipede's house.

Her figure was outlined against the door itself and she was knocking there.

Trailer watched her from a little distance and at last saw the door open.

Carmen was not admitted.

She stepped across the threshold, but her way was barred by the portly figure of the presiding fairy of the establishment.

The detective slipped down the sidewalk so as to be within hearing.

"You can't come in. Me no see any one till to-morra," he heard the voice of Mother Centipede say.

"But I won't stay a minute," pleaded Carmen.

"You no see. Wait! Coma to-morra!"

"I could choke you, you hag!" cried the girl. "I have a mind to do it. You're a mean old tigress and some day you'll see the inside of a jail, you will."

"Gitta out! You little toda, you gitta gone."

Carmen backed out and the door was slammed in her face. She stopped a moment and looked all around, then, with another growl at her ill success, started off again.

Once more she had the detective on her trail, and after walking several squares she turned suddenly into an open hallway and was lost to sight.

The detective came up directly and saw over the door the sign "The Strawberry," and in he went.

At the head of the flight of steps he found another door with a red glass set in it, and this he pushed open.

He ushered himself into a room well furnished with tables, at which sat a lot of women sipping soft drinks.

It was a woman's tipping place, and he knew it on sight.

But where was Carmen?

The detective was on the point of drawing back when he was caught by the arm and pulled forward.

"Straight ahead," said the woman who had stopped him. "You will find her down the corridor, third door on the left."

He passed on, opened a door at the end of the room and walked into a long hall with door on each side.

"Third door to the left, eh?" he said to himself, and then he wondered how he would find Carmen.

The next moment he heard a sharp report, and, as he opened the "third door to the left," he was greeted by a cloud of powder smoke and the body of Carmen, the maid, lay at his feet.

In her gloved hand was a still smoking pistol, and her fingers were wound about the ivory stock.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TIGRESS IN BLUE.

Poor Carmen!

Detective Trailer instinctively thought this as he bounded into the little stall and bent over the body of the yet breathing girl.

He raised her head and looked down into her face. It was white and tensely drawn.

A few drops of blood had come to the lips otherwise ashen in hue, and her hands were clinched.

There lay upon the table a hastily scrawled note, which the ferret saw and seized. He still held it in his hand without looking at it, while he attended to Carmen.

The habitués of the Strawberry had been summoned to the spot by the report, but the detective and the woman who had directed him to "the third door on the left" kept them out.

"Shall I summon the patrol, sir?" asked the woman, kindly of face. "She hasn't been coming here long, sir. She looked like a girl of good parts, indeed she did, sir; but at times she was depressed."

"Did she ever meet any person here?" asked Trailer.

"Never, sir. She fell to liking this little stall, and I always let her have it when she came, if it was not in use."

By this time Carmen seemed to come back to life, and her eyes became fixed on the detective.

Tracy Trailer had laid the note on the edge of the table for a moment, and all at once the hand of the girl grasped it.

"I'll take it with me," cried Carmen. "It wasn't intended for you, nohow."

Trailer regretted that he had not placed the bit of paper in his pocket, for the next moment the girl had madly torn it in two and flung the bits away.

"She'll get over this," said the other woman.

Then there was a wild gasp on Carmen's part, and she fell back in the ferret's arms. Was she dead?

Ten minutes later a police surgeon had pronounced Carmen dangerously wounded and the ambulance took her away.

Trailer went back to the little stall after having seen her off, and looked for the torn note.

He found a small piece, and held it close to the light.

Carmen had written hastily, and the words "he robbed the safe" were all that greeted the detective's gaze.

Look as he might, not another bit of the note could he find, and Trailer sought out the woman who ran the Strawberry.

"Did you pick up the note which the poor girl tore up and threw away?" he asked.

"Not I? I haven't been there since we carried her out."

Trailer said that it had vanished, at which she expressed some surprise, saying that she could not see who had taken the pieces.

"When did the girl commence coming here?" asked the detective.

"Let me see. About three months ago."

"Always alone?"

"Not always. At times she was accompanied by a lady who was always veiled."

"You never saw her face, did you?"

"Never."

"Did she appear young?"

"About as young as the girl."

"They remained in stall number three, did they?"

"Yes. I have thought that but for the veiled one the other would never have found me out. It looked like a case of decoy to me, but I may wrong the veiled woman. There was something refined about the unknown; she never spoke while in my presence."

Detective Trailer did not care to follow Carmen to the accident hospital.

He believed that remorse or the fear of some punishment had driven the girl to the rash act she had performed, but from what he had seen of her she was not bad beyond redemption—just some one's tool.

Trailer looked at his watch as he went down upon the sidewalk, and saw that the hour was not so very late.

"I will be message-bearer to the mis-

dress," said he to himself, and he posted off up-town.

Not long afterward the bell of the Shanks mansion rang, and the woman who was midway on the staircase in a blue dress-gown paused, and then tripped down to the landing.

She opened the door herself, and, seeing who was there, started a little, but held the door open.

"You must have some tidings," she said to the dare-devil detective, as she conducted him to the parlor, where he sat down.

"I am the bearer of bad news," was the reply. "You haven't heard of Carmen's act?"

"Carmen's? I have heard nothing, and I cannot think that Carmen would do anything rash."

"Was she ever despondent?"

"At times," as her face lost color. "She had her spells of depression, but I never thought they would lead to anything."

"They have, for the girl has attempted her own life."

There was no start at this intelligence. Mrs. Shanks seemed to have prepared herself for anything. She merely bit her lip and looked at the ferret.

"Is—she—dead?"

"Not yet. She has been taken to the hospital—"

"Why was she not sent here?"

"The police generally have their way, you know. The surgeon at his examination pronounced it a dangerous case, and she had to go to the accident ward."

"Where did it happen? On the street?"

"No; in a resort for women, a rather good resort, by the way, called the Strawberry."

There was another very slight start on Mrs. Shanks' part, but she controlled herself quickly.

"Of course you have never heard of the Strawberry," continued Trailer, watching the banker's wife from beneath his brows. "It is one of those resorts which you have never had occasion to frequent, for you must have the best of wine in your cellars."

"We have, indeed. If you will wait, Mr. Trailer, I will let you sample it."

As Tracy offered no objection, he waited alone in the parlor while Winnie Shanks went after the wine, which she soon brought in on a silver tray.

"I never drink wine myself," said she, as she deftly opened one of the little bottles. "However, Mr. Trailer, I will take a sip so as not to be stubborn."

She filled two goblets and pushed one across the tray.

There was a sparkle to the wine which attracted the detective.

He saw her fill the other goblet, and pull it toward her with a jeweled hand, while her eyes, swimming in a sea of brightness, appeared to shine balefully.

The detective hesitated.

Had he placed himself unwittingly in the hands of a designing woman?

Was there death in the cup?

He looked at the liquid and then over the rim of the delicate glass into the beaming face of the banker's wife.

They were alone in that great house, for he was almost convinced that Sergius Shanks had been taken somewhere by those who kept the secret of the removal.

Winnie looked at the ferret, and raised her goblet.

"Mr. Shanks, who will be able to see you in a few days, got this wine from a captain who said it had been found in the hold of an old vessel, wrecked years and years ago in the harbor of Barcelona," she chatted. "There is a sparkle to it which I have never seen in other wines, and I more than half believe the story which came to my husband with the purchase."

As she finished, she bent over the wine and sipped slowly.

Very much like a tigress in ambush she was watching the ferret all the time.

He did not hesitate any longer, but raised the glass to his lips and drank.

Winnie Shanks set her glass down and looked toward the curtained recess at the other side of the room.

She betrayed no emotion, but the ferret caught the glance.

Already the white hand of the mistress of the Madison Avenue mansion was refilling the detective's goblet, and her eyes were regarding him with an expression akin to triumph.

"That terrible deed of Carmen's," cried the banker's wife. "It unnerves me. What if the poor girl should die in the hospital? And to do the deed in such a place as the Strawberry!"

"She might have been accompanied by her vailed friend," said Trailer.

"Oh, she had a friend, then? A vailed one, Mr. Trailer? This makes a romance of the terrible affair."

Trailer tried to reply, but a sudden pain seemed to dart to his heart, and he fell back in the chair.

He had not drunk more than one-half of the wine in the glass, yet he felt that some baleful influence had seized him.

"You are not ill, I hope?" cried Winnie Shanks.

Ill? There was fire in his blood. He felt the flushes that seemed to creep over his forehead; he felt cold at the ends of the fingers.

What strange malady had seized upon him?

All the time, but now, as if through a mist, burned the dark eyes of the banker's wife.

Now her face receded and now approached his until she seemed to touch it.

He tried to rise, but he could not. The face of Winnie Shanks grew larger and then melted away like the fading face of a dream.

Summoning all his powers, Detective Trailer got upon his feet.

He pushed the chair back. He staggered, not toward the door, but toward the curtained recess.

It might be a window, and it might be nothing but an alcove, but some one was there. He would have staked his life on this.

With a cry which sounded afar off, Winnie Shanks came round the table with one hand thrown out as if to grasp him.

He remembered breaking away from her and darting toward the curtain.

She came after him, like a bounding leopardess, her eyes aflame and her lips apart.

Detective Trailer was almost at the curtain, when it was dashed aside.

Some one rushed out straight at him.

"Quick! quick!" cried the banker's wife.

The ferret tried to pass the man who had sprung from the recess, but at that moment the hands of the eager woman clutched him, and he was jerked back.

"Hold him! Don't let him go. We are lost if he escapes now!" he heard, and then all became suddenly dark.

Detective Trailer had been captured by a trap into which he had deliberately walked.

He felt volition leave his limbs; he felt himself in the powerful grip of a man and knew that he was being dragged across the room by two pairs of hands.

The wolf had caught the fox. The man of many trails may have reached the end of the last one, and half an hour later Winnie Shanks tripped down the staircase in a blue gown and swept into the parlor as calmly as if nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened there!

Where was the detective?

What had become of the prince of spotters, and who would now take up the dark skein of crime and follow it to the guilty?

She sat down and opened a book of poems. There was a smile at the lips, a deep gleam in the lustrous eyes; but there was no glancing at the curtained recess.

CHAPTER XVII.

NIPSIE ATOM'S ADVENTURE.

If one had looked for Detective Trailer at his usual resorts the next day he would not have been found.

Indeed, a messenger from the inspector of police came to the little place which he called his thinking shop without delivering the message, and was forced to return it to Mulberry Street.

The inspector supposed that the prince of shadows was on the trail, and did not repeat the message when night came.

In another part of the city, and in a

chamber which we have already visited, sat a little girl in a curiously shaped arm-chair.

She was talking to a boy who looked very much like the usual street Arab, only his clothes were a trifle neater, and his face had less of the prevailing grime of the gutter.

The child was Nipsie Atom and the boy her stanch friend, Bantam, to whom she was warmly attached.

Bantam had dropped in upon the little girl with the Hartz canary and the oldish face, and Nipsie had been telling him about her visit to the detective's den.

"I wonder why he hasn't been here to-day," said the child. "He half promised to drop in to see if I had discovered anything, for you see I have to watch the window across the way."

"No one has been there to-day, eh, Nipsie?"

"No; the curtain has been pulled down all the time."

"Then you wouldn't have any news for him if he came?"

"Not much, but—"

"Just look over there. I saw the curtain move. I know I did."

"But there's no light in the window."

"Of course not."

"It may be some of the people who live in Norway Castle."

"The rats, you mean, Nipsie?"

"Yes, the human rats, male and female. There's Mrs. Jagger, as Tracy calls her, and the little old cobbler on the second floor who whistles while he cobbles, and the Pecks who never get up till near noon, and—and—"

"Whew! Where did you get a catalogue of the trap?" broke in the boy.

"I know only what Trailer had picked up over there. I say, Bantam, would you mind going down and seeing if he isn't somewhere in the neighborhood?"

"He'll come if he's on the way, sure. But there goes the curtain again, Nipsie."

"I saw it that time," cried the little girl. "It moved upward, as if some one was in that terrible room peeping over at our window. I'll pull down our curtain."

"No; git back further from the winder. There, that's it. Now we kin watch it all we please."

Bantam had pushed the child back, and both were watching the opposite window in silence.

"Wouldn't I like to see who's in that room?" said the boy.

Nipsie looked at him a moment, and then touched his arm.

"You're active, Bantam. You aren't afraid, are you?"

"N—no!"

"Wouldn't it be a feather in your cap if you could slip over there and pick up something for Trailer when he comes?"

"By Jove! it would, Nipsie. I believe I'll do it."

"You know where the stairs are in Norway Castle. You can just slip up to the room and peep into it."

"Good-by, Nipsie. I'm off."

Little Miss Atom saw the boy glide from the room, and for a moment heard his feet outside, but the sounds soon died away.

She fell to playing with the canary, and between her attentions to the bird watched the window across the way.

The night without deepened. She could no longer detect any movements in the curtain, and as no light appeared in the suspected window she could not guess what Bantam might have discovered.

Nipsie Atom suddenly turned to the door which she had left unlocked, for she had heard a footstep outside. Was Bantam coming back?

The door opened slowly as she looked, and then she fell back in her chair with a suppressed cry.

Some one was there, but it was not Bantam.

The person who had opened the door came forward with a pair of keen, penetrating eyes fastened upon the little cripple, and Nipsie could not help regarding him with a frightened stare.

He was a tall, well-shaped man, agile, as she could see, but with a certain air of gentility which stamped him a person used to the better walks of life.

With his baleful eyes fastened upon Nipsie, he came on, speaking not, but stopping at last in front of her chair.

"Who are you?" asked the child.

There was no reply.

"I don't know you, sir. I am sure we have never met before. I am Nipsie Atom, and I live alone here."

Not a word in reply did the finely chiselled lips pronounce, and the eyes seemed to pierce the child to the heart.

"Do you want to hurt me? Beware if you do! I have a friend who will find you out."

Still not a word.

Already Nipsie Atom was more than alarmed. There was something terrible in this silent man, who stood before her looking at her with the strangest eyes she had ever seen.

"Oh, who are you? Why—don't—you—tell—me?"

The last word seemed to end in weariness, and to die away like a whisper.

The right hand of the stranger was put out and passed before little Miss Atom's eyes, almost touching her cold and sweaty forehead.

She watched the man like a person under a spell.

He came a little closer; he looked down into her dreamy eyes and smiled.

"How are you now, my child?" he said.

The little figure moved a trifle.

"I see many nice things; so many of them. Why don't you let me touch them all?"

"You must not," was the reply. "I want you to go with me."

"Please take me down the sunny walk there. You see how the flowers bloom yonder."

"We'll go there presently," said the man. "Where are you now, little one?"

"I am in a room where a man is lying on the floor."

"That is right. It is not a nice room, is it?"

"No; there is no carpet on the floor, but there is a pool of blood where the man lies."

"Yes, yes. Get down and look at him."

"Must I do that? I don't like to."

"Look at his hand. That's all you need do."

"I see. There is a finger missing."

"How keen your little eyes are. Now what see you?"

"Another man has entered the room."

"What is he like?"

"He is tall and well-built, like my friend, Trailer. He has real black eyes and his side whiskers seem pasted to his face. He has a mustache, too."

"What does he do?"

"He searches the other's garments. He looks through every pocket, and into the bosom. What is the man looking for?"

There was a long silence.

The mesmerist came closer to Nipsie. Their faces nearly touched.

"Can you walk, little one?"

"Not very well. But when some one leads me I can get along fairly well."

"Would you like to go out?"

"If you would kindly take me."

"To the park?"

"Yes; I have been there, but never after dark."

The man picked the child from the chair and helped her to the door.

Nipsie told the truth when she said she had some use of her poor limbs, for she walked a little with his help.

He carried her down-stairs, taking good care to keep in the shadow everywhere, and all the time avoiding people.

On the last landing he dodged behind a door with the agility of a cat, and waited.

A little figure darted past them.

It was Bantam returning from his trip to the dead man's chamber, whither Nipsie had sent him.

Bantam vanished in a moment, and then the stranger helped Miss Atom into the street.

She was still under the potent spell.

She walked poorly and slow, and seeing this, he stooped suddenly and lifted her in his arms.

She did not resist, but clung to him and was carried away.

Around the first corner he found a cab, which seemed to be waiting for him. At any rate, the driver on the box moved a little when he caught sight of the couple, and the cab door flew open.

In another second Nipsie Atom and her companion were inside, and the door shut.

Away went the vehicle, while Nipsie seemed to fall asleep in one corner and never heeded the jolts over the stones of Gotham.

Now and then the man bent over his little prisoner with the air of a triumphant eagle, and whenever the cab passed a light his face was seen for a moment gloat-ing over his victory.

Nipsie never knew how long she was carried over the streets of New York.

When she came out of her strange trance she put out her hands and called Bantam pathetically.

She was lying on a sofa, and over against the wall, reposing in an arm-chair, was the figure of a woman.

By and by the little girl made out this figure, and she looked at it some time before she spoke.

She was not in her little nest in the tenement. She could see nothing of Dick, the Hartz canary, and there was nothing of the curtained window of the house of the missing finger.

Where was she, and how had she come to this place?

It was some time before she became bold enough to branch out in inquiry.

She had watched the woman nearly half an hour, and had seen that she did not move.

She must be asleep.

Nipsie made a noise, and that instant the creature stirred. She started up and bounded over to the sofa.

"What is it, child?" she said.

There was no trace of sympathy or kindness in that voice. It was hard and cold, and sent a shiver to the child's heart.

"Where am I?" asked Nipsie.

"Where you are liable to be a long time."

"But won't Bantam come here?"

"If he does, we'll strangle him!"

The little cripple shrank from the woman, whose hair was a dark red, and whose eyes seemed to be set deeper than common in her large, ogreish head.

"Who brought me here, and why, and why didn't they fetch Dick, the canary, with me?"

"I'll be your canary, I will, little one. I'll do all the whistling that's to be done."

"You?"

"That's what I'm here for! Now, you don't want to be too inquisitive."

"Oh, you're mean. You're a bad woman; but just wait till Trailer hears of this outrage. Then you'll wish you had never talked to me that way."

"Who's Trailer, pray?"

"You'll find out, soon enough. You'll have Trailer at your throat pretty soon, you will."

The woman fell back and laughed till her sides seemed to ache, and poor little Nipsie, with her face white with rage, fell against the side of the sofa and watched her.

She felt, child though she was, that she was in a spider's web.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STAFFORD'S HUNT.

The somewhat strange disappearance of Harley Stafford after his release on bail puzzled Detective Trailer. We have seen how he attempted to find the young teller and how he lost the trail after a visit to his lodgings.

Perhaps if he had run across the young man the scene in Mrs. Shanks' parlor might not have taken place, but, as it was, he was overcome by powerful enemies and vanished as suddenly as did the teller of the Wall Street bank.

Stafford, eager to find out what had become of Sergius Shanks, had simply taken the first train to the Quaker City.

He proposed to do a little detective work on his own hook, confident that if the president of the Goldstone had gone over to Philadelphia for his health, he

could find some trace of him before the trail got cold.

But he was doomed to disappointment, for he could not find that any one answering the description of the man had stepped from the express upon which he was said to have taken passage.

The depot gate-keeper in the Broad Street station in Philadelphia, a keen, observing man, wanted to assist Stafford all he could, but could not remember having seen Shanks at all. He said that he distinctly remembered that very few passengers alighted from that particular train and thought that if the president had come on it he would have been seen from the description given of him.

Stafford was almost ready to go back to New York, and turned away feeling that the president of the bank had never been put on the train.

"You are Mr. Stafford, aren't you?" said a voice at the young man's elbow, at which he turned.

He was confronted by a middle-aged person, well dressed, with a slightly clerical air.

"I beg pardon, but I overheard you talking to the gate-keeper a moment ago. You were asking about a gentleman supposed to have come over from New York the other night?"

"I was."

"Well, I happened to come over on that particular train myself. I remember seeing a lady and her escort in the Jersey City depot just before starting and heard her say that her husband would not know whether he took the train or not. It was a singular remark and drew my attention to her."

Stafford was interested and asked for a description of the woman in question and received for a reply a fair one of Mrs. Shanks.

"She came into your car, did she?"

"Yes. But she was alone. I heard her make the remark to a gentleman in the depot just before we started. I am quite sure she was not accompanied by any one while in the coach."

"I see," thought Stafford. "There is a foul conspiracy of some kind afoot. Sergius Shanks is not in Philadelphia, but must be in New York, and where but at his own home?"

He thanked the gentleman for his information and took the next train back.

The young teller was laboring under a good deal of excitement occasioned by his startling arrest and his subsequent trip to the Quaker City in search of Sergius Shanks.

He had a good deal of news for Detective Trailer.

He believed that the ferret would not believe him guilty of conspiracy with the man who had left his finger in the steel safe in the bank, and he was very eager to meet Tracy Trailer.

On the way back Stafford sat in a secluded part of the coach and took but little notice of anything.

He recalled his interview with Cook at the Eldorado, and wondered if the cashier had tried to find him since.

When the train pulled into the depot at Jersey City the young teller sprang up and left the car.

Morning had come again and the air that swept up from the Bay was very bracing.

On the boat he discovered that he was a target for many eyes, and suspected that his arrest, with comments, had been aired in the newspapers.

He noticed a friend or two on the ferry who moved away from him, and for the first time in his life he knew what it was to be suspected of a crime.

Once more at home, Stafford asked Lucy, the maid, if any one had called.

He was told of Trailer's visit and felt sorry that he had not been home to see the ferret.

"I think your other friend came back."

"Which one?"

"The man who occupied the room all day by himself."

"Oh, Tom Mattoon?"

"I can't say what his name was, but

last night some one came to your door and I thought he entered the room. But the bed was all right this morning and I thought then that he had knocked and gone away."

Stafford looked around the room and saw the girl go away.

"I wonder what Nina thinks?" suddenly entered his mind, and he started as he lost color. "Does she believe that I did such a thing? No, no; it cannot be. I know that. Nina is a woman of too much sterling worth to desert me now."

He felt a little unwell after his exciting visit to Philadelphia and the night ride back to New York, and threw himself down upon the sofa.

In a few minutes he fell asleep and when he awoke he started to discover that it was ten o'clock.

He had nothing to do at the bank, now.

He knew that another was in his place, which was just what he wanted, for it gave him time and opportunity to clear his skirts of the infamous charge.

"Now for Nina," said Stafford.

He was eager to meet the beautiful girl on Madison Avenue and hastened uptown for that purpose.

He rang the bell with a good deal of nervousness, which was quite natural, and awaited the response with his lips set hard.

"Miss Cook is not at home," said a voice as the door was pulled open an inch and the face of the maid vanished.

Stafford gasped.

"I don't believe a cursed word of that," he cried. "Not at home to me? It cannot be."

He pushed impulsively past the maid before the girl inside could lock the door. In another second he stood before her.

"You will tell Miss Nina that I—Harley—am here. I won't take up but a minute of her time."

The girl threw a quick glance up the staircase, but did not speak.

"Nina is at home," continued Stafford, raising his voice. "I must see her. I—"

"She is not at home to you, sir," was the reply.

Stafford nearly staggered against the wall.

This was the hardest blow of all; it was worse than the arrest and accusation.

Had Nina turned against him? Had she arrayed herself on the side of his enemies, and was he to quit the house without seeing her and hearing why she believed him guilty before he had a chance to prove his innocence?

It was worse than death itself.

He dashed impulsively past the maid and reached the first step.

It was a bold move to invade the privacy of the woman he loved; but Stafford's cheeks were flushed and his eyes frightened the girl.

"You can't see Miss Nina. She is sick," cried the maid.

"That's a new face on the matter. A moment ago you told me she was not at home. Tell her I am here."

Stafford's tones were commanding, and he leaned against the wall, while he looked up the broad steps.

In another moment there was the swish of garments overhead and to his joy the young fellow saw the white face of Nina Cook bending over the balustrade.

"Nina! Nina! It is I," he cried.

He was at the bottom of the flight again, but she waved him back.

"No, no! Not now!" said the fair girl.

"But hear me just a second."

"I cannot—dare not. I am under oath. I cannot listen now."

"But it is all false—as false as the heart that coined the accusation. I never helped to plunder the safe."

There was silence, but a look of unutterable woe at the head of the steps.

"You don't believe it, Nina?" cried Stafford.

"Olga, you will please let Mr. Stafford out," said Nina.

"But Nina—Nina—you must hear me a moment, no more. I cannot go away with the fear in my heart that you believe me guilty of this crime. You will, surely, Nina—"

The figure overhead vanished with the name barely finished, and the teller of the Goldstone staggered back like a man in a dreadful maze.

"Oath-bound? Who put her under an accursed bond like that?" he cried. "She dare not speak to me—dare not tell me what she honestly believes! It is infamous. It is cruel. Some one shall suffer for this villainy."

Olga was at the door waiting to let him out.

"Where is Cadmus Cook?" asked Stafford.

"At the bank, probably," was the reply.

"You have ears, girl. You must have overheard what has passed in conversation beneath this roof during the last twenty-four hours. You know a good deal. Housemaids generally do."

"But you don't think I would betray my mistress? I would sooner drown myself, sir."

There was no hope there, and without another word Stafford quitted the house, though he halted on the steps and shut his hands hard, looking back over his shoulder like a man desperate enough to retrace his steps and fight his way up those steps to Nina.

The teller walked away, hardly knowing what he was doing.

He walked down the Avenue, looking but little about him, but when he raised his head he caught sight of an elegant house at which he started.

He saw the silver plate on the door bearing a name often uppermost in his mind during the last few hours, and in another moment he was at the bell.

Footsteps came toward the door and the moment it was opened he dashed into the hall.

A half-stifed cry greeted him and a woman fell back and gazed at him in amazement.

He stood before Winnie Shanks, the banker's wife, and she must have seen that the man was desperate.

He had not encountered her since the episode in the depot across the river, and she seemed to feel that he had come to her on a desperate mission.

"Are you alone?" asked Stafford, looking at the woman and seeing even before she spoke that she was.

"I am quite alone," was the reply.

"Where's Carmen?"

Mrs. Shanks started a little.

"You haven't heard about Carmen, then?" she said.

"No."

"The poor girl is at the hospital. She has attempted her own life. She—"

"Couldn't do the bidding of her mistress any longer and keep her self-respect, eh?"

Instantly the face before Stafford grew red and the eyes seemed to glitter.

"Beware, sir! That is an insinuation!"

"Just what I intended it should be, madam. You told me at the bank that if I played spy any more I would lose my head. I guess you have already seen that I have lost it."

"Sir? This to me in my own house?" cried Winnie, retreating toward the open parlor door.

"To you and straight into your teeth—as straight as I can send it! Your husband never went to Philadelphia. I know it. He is still in this house. You're playing with fire. Good morning, madam."

CHAPTER XIX.

INTO THE SPIDER'S WEB.

Stafford never stopped to note the effects of his shots.

He was at the door and in another moment out upon the street.

"I guess she understood my words," said he, with a smile as he walked away.

"I didn't go thither to mince words with that woman, and from now on it is war to the knife between us."

In soberer moments the young teller might not have used such language, but he was not himself and his nerves were a little unstrung.

"The detective next," said he to him-

self, and in a little while he was at Trailer's door.

But this time it did not open, and despite his rapping, it remained closed.

The teller went home at last, but not until he had tried to unearth Tracy Trailer.

Lucy was waiting to see him and to say that the man who had occupied his room for a whole day had just left the house, leaving with her a note for him.

Stafford took the bit of paper and noted the address which had been scrawled thereon, then rammed it into his pocket and started off.

"I can see Tom if I can't find Trailer," thought he. "I can tell Mattoon my troubles, and he may be able to suggest a line of battle against the enemy."

For the first time that day Stafford found somebody at home.

He heard some one spring up and cross a room, and in another minute he was standing before the ex-jailbird.

"You've been roused. Any one can see that," said Mattoon, with a grin. "You've been on the warpath, and I don't wonder if what the newspapers have said is true."

"What do they say? Let me see one."

Tom Mattoon handed the teller a paper, with which he withdrew to the nearest window.

It did not take him long to find the account of his arrest and he read it breathlessly.

It was not so bad after all. The account praised his faithful services at the Goldstone and hoped that the charges were not true. But a little vinegar was poured into the wound in the closing paragraph, which said that Detective Dashaway, who had effected the arrest, was a very careful officer and had no false arrests put down to his credit.

Stafford flung the paper toward Mattoon, who had been watching him all the time.

"You know how it goes yourself, now," said the man.

"Yes. I know what it is to be arrested when one is innocent," was the reply.

"So do I," smiled Tom.

"What do you believe, Tom? You don't take any stock in the infernal charges, do you?"

"I don't. I'll be square with you, Stafford. I don't believe you had a hand in that affair. Some devilry is at the bottom of it all. I am free to say that and I'd say it anywhere provided they'd let me, which you know they wouldn't do."

"Because you've been up, Tom?"

"Yes. Once stained always stained, you know. But where have you been? You've had a serious time with some one, Stafford."

"In the first place, I've been over to Philadelphia. Next, I called on Miss Cook, and after that I threw a little hot shot into the siren's camp."

"I suppose Mrs. Shanks is the afore-said siren?"

"You are right."

The teller went over to the window and looked out.

"What do you know, Tom? You've been abroad, I suppose?"

"Not much in day-time. I'm a night bird, I am—I'm forced to comb my plumage in the dark and even then to watch all the time. You see I'm a suspect."

"Well, what have you found out, anyhow? I wasn't in the city last night. You were."

Tom Mattoon shrugged his shoulders and seemed to watch Stafford half suspiciously.

"I've again seen the man we saw sitting on the sofa with the hidden hand."

"Oh, you mean the man to whom you took me in order to show me a hand with a missing finger?"

"Yes."

"But there was no missing finger? His hand was all right."

Mattoon nodded.

"Well, I've seen that man since. One at a time, Stafford. He was on the street. As I live, he must be the brother of the other."

"The brother of the dead man?"

"That's it."

"Well?"

"His name is Glare—Gideon Glare. I remember seeing his name on the books up the river. He's been there."

"Like yourself, Tom."

"Yes, but I don't see why you have to refer to my trip there so often. You may—"

Tom Mattoon stopped and did not finish the sentence, for he saw that Stafford was already losing color.

"Would you like to see this man face to face?"

"Why should I?"

"Oh, I hardly know, but something tells me that he is going to become a factor in your case more or less."

"Do you really believe that, Tom?"

"I do. I know where he is at this minute, for I left him not very long ago."

"Don't be in a hurry, Tom. Let me catch second wind. I have been on the go ever since I came back from the Quaker City. I tried to find Tracy Trailer, but he was not in."

"I've been there myself, but with the same result. See here. Don't you know that if that man gets too close on the guilty there will be a turning of the worm?"

"I look for that. Tom, let me tell you something. Sergius Shanks never went over to Philadelphia."

"I could have told you that."

"I am sure he is still in this city. He is at home."

"I don't think so."

"If you were to search the Madison Avenue mansion you would find the president of the Goldstone Bank at home, though perhaps not to you."

"You are wrong, Stafford. I've been all over the house."

Stafford gave the man a quick stare and then leaned toward him with a puzzled face.

"You don't mean to tell me that you have called on Mrs. Shanks?"

"Not called on her, but I've been all over the fine house. You must remember that I still know a thing or two about house entering, though I've been out of practice some time."

"Yes."

"Sergius Shanks isn't in that house. I have been to his room. I have invaded the house from garret to cellar—"

"Where was madam?"

"I didn't inquire. I only know that I didn't ask after her, for, in fact, there was no one to ask. I didn't run across Carmen, the maid."

"I'm not surprised at that, for Carmen is at the hospital."

"Why there?"

"The girl tried to shoot herself—did so, in fact, and now hovers between life and death in the dangerous ward."

This information seemed to take Tom Mattoon's breath away.

"That means something, for girls like the giantess don't try that work for fun. Well! I went through the house. Sergius Shanks is not there, and if, as you say, he didn't go to Philadelphia, where is he?"

The perplexed Stafford shook his head.

"Puzzles you, doesn't it? Why didn't you ask Winnie?"

"I would have got a stare for my pains."

"Doubtless. Harley, if you could wait till night I would like to take you to a friend of mine, who may know something about the disappearance of Sergius Shanks."

"Why not go now?"

"I am a night bird, you must know."

"But I have clothes for you. You need not be Tom Mattoon in my garments."

"If I thought I could attempt it, by Jove! I'd do it. I will for your sake, Stafford. But you must change, too."

"You know the way to my lodgings. You can slip through the crowds. I will go ahead and tell Lucy to admit you at once."

"I'll be there."

Half an hour later, Tom Mattoon, ar-

rayed in one of Stafford's suits which fitted him very well and quite altered his appearance, stood before the glass in the young teller's room.

"How far is it away?" asked Stafford.

"About ten squares. I don't know what she'll say."

"A woman, eh?"

"Virga—a red-haired woman, not pretty, and a tigress when she wants to be."

"But what makes you think she might know something about the bank president?"

"Because she used to know Cadmus Cook."

There was a sudden start on Stafford's part and he looked at Mattoon for a silent minute.

"I know you don't like to have me reflect on the cashier of the Goldstone, because you think a good deal of his sister, but all the same, I say that he used to know Virga, the woman to whom I am going to take you."

"Does she live alone?"

"Yes. She inhabits a small house not far from the Bridge, and she generally knows who crosses the threshold before the door is opened. Virga is not an angel, notwithstanding her name. I haven't seen her since I came back, but we will find her at home."

The two left the house and Tom Mattoon guided Stafford, eager and excited, half way across the city. They found themselves in a perfect labyrinth of streets, and at last the ex-jailbird rapped at a narrow door.

Footsteps came toward the door itself and then there was a long silence.

"She's at her old tricks, inspecting us first," whispered Tom. "Ah, she knows me, at any rate, and we're going in."

The moment the door opened Tom Mattoon slid into the darkened hallway, with the teller at his heels, but the following moment Stafford was pushed back by a hand of iron.

"You must go out!" said a harsh voice, as at the same time he caught sight of a homely face framed in dark red hair.

"He's my friend, Virga," said Tom, in explanatory tones. "I've fetched him here for a purpose and there may be money in it for you, and lots of it at that."

"I don't want money. I've got all-I want now. That man must go out."

"Come on," said Mattoon to Stafford, who was ready to advance. "I'll stand good for you."

But the next moment, with the spring of a tigress, Virga the Red seized Stafford by the throat and forced him against the wall as she slid him toward the door.

"I say no," she cried. "I know my business and I know this man. He's a felon already, and he can't remain in this house. He must get out or I'll choke him to death."

Stafford believed that the maddened creature would carry out her threat, for already her fingers had sunk into his throat, and in the silence that followed her threat they heard a child's voice cry out:

"Won't some one come and take me out of this spider's web? I don't want to die here."

"That is the voice of Nipsie, Trailer's little friend," flashed across Stafford's mind. "In Heaven's name, what is the child doing in this house?"

The voice was not heard again.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TWO UNFORTUNATES.

Tracy Trailer, the New York ferret, recalled in another place than the house on Madison Avenue his startling experience there.

His most vivid recollection of his last interview with Winnie Shanks was the man who came out from the curtained recess and seized him in a grip of steel.

He remembered, too, the burning sensation in his throat after drinking the wine and the terrible chill which, at the same time, seemed to leap to his heart.

If there was not death in the wine, there

was something akin to it, and he was in the snare.

For the first time in his career he had fallen into the hands of a cool woman, one who was playing a deep game, and when he came back to life and found himself surrounded by dense darkness, he wondered where he was.

He could not tell what time of day or night it was, and the strange sensation still held him in thrall.

The detective groped his way through the gloom, and at last found a wall.

It was hard and smooth, and he managed to creep round the room, finding now and then a little recess, and one window and a door.

Where was he?

He stopped to listen now and then, but heard no sound. Was he under ground?

Trailer cursed himself, and then lapsed into silence.

Minutes became hours in his imagination, and hours seemed to run into days.

The door he tried, but found it securely fastened, and the window offered him no avenue to freedom.

Like a caged eagle the man of many trails stood in the darkness and thought.

One by one the recollections of the last few hours came back to him, and he lived over them all in that strange place.

How long would he be kept a rat in the trap before the cat dealt with him?

When would the signal be given that would remove him from action, and thus make sure of victory those who were plotting for high stakes?

The detective leaned against the wall and gave himself up to deep thought.

At last he went back to the door and threw himself against it.

It was as solid as a portal of stone, and he had to recoil with a cry of despair.

There was nothing left for him but patience, and patience in such a prison as that was torture.

At length he heard a sound, which seemed to come through the wall, and he glued his ear to it.

It was a sound which seemed to come from some place beyond the wall and near the floor.

Trailer stooped and listened.

It sounded like the gnawing of a rat, but now and then it stopped and ceased for a minute.

The detective ran his fingers along the floor where the wall joined it.

All at once he withdrew his hand, for it had struck something sharp, almost needle-like.

That something moved—it revolved.

Ah, a gimlet penetrated the wall at the floor, and his hand had touched it.

Some one was on the other side! But who?

Tracy Trailer tried to imagine who would attempt his rescue, but he could not.

Surely it could not be Gideon Glare, for that worthy could not have found out where he was, and he felt sure that it was not Stafford.

Then, for a second, he thought of Nipsie Atom, and for half that time of Bantam.

It could not be either of these little people beyond the wall, and then he had to cease conjecturing.

The gimlet was withdrawn and remained out of the hole it had made.

Trailer put his lips close to the little hole.

"I am here," he said, and then waited for a response.

None came.

"Did you hear me?" he asked. "I am here—I—Tracy Trailer."

There was a faint cry beyond the wall, and then silence settled down once more.

"Who is there?" he asked again.

There came a sharp little cry beyond the wall, and he held his breath.

"I am trying to get out of this dreadful house," said the voice.

"Who are you?"

"I am Babe."

The detective reflected a moment.

"What have you been working with?"

"An old gimlet which I found in an old cupboard in this room."

"How have you succeeded?"

"I have made a hole; but a man can't crawl through a gimlet hole, you know."

"Not very well. Who put you in this place?"

"You wouldn't believe it if I told you. Ha, ha!"

"I don't know," answered the detective. "You might tell me and see."

"I let myself be drawn into the flame like a moth. It's a rather long story, but it's a mighty interesting one. I am Babe, as I have told you—Babe Orell. I am a man, despite my name, but I am also a fool."

"Like others," said the detective, thinking of himself and the glass of wine.

"Hear me through, will you?"

"I am listening. Go ahead."

"I happen to know a woman who just now is playing a game of some kind. You may have heard of her, but I don't know. I knew her when she wasn't knee high to a duck, and they used to call us brother and sister."

"But you were not?"

"No, not at all. Pitti, as we called her then, was a pretty girl, destined to capture some gold-bug, as I always told her, and it was I who got her to give Mother Centipede the slip and not play fly in her web so much. Do you know Mother Centipede?"

"Slightly," said the ferret. "Do you mean the woman who keeps the bird-store on Canal Street?"

"The very person. There isn't another woman like her in the world. Well, as I was saying, Pitti and I were much together, and they used to say we were twins. Pshaw! Pitti had the face of a little angel, though not an angel's disposition. I had the face of a little ogre, which I have yet."

"But I wander." There was a laugh, but the unseen speaker came back to his subject. "I am here because I stand in the way of Pitti—not the Pitti of Canal Street, but the Winnie Shanks of the Avenue."

Trailer did not start. The man on the other side of the wall was leading up to this revelation, and he had prepared the ferret for it.

"You see, I am cooped up because I know a few things which, if told, might be unpleasant for that woman. What if I were to go out and tell that she used to be the Pitti of the Canal Street nest, that she hasn't just the bluest of blood in her delicate veins, and that she is not the best of wives? Don't you see it, sir?"

"It would create a sensation, that's a fact."

"I should say so. And, fool-like, I threatened to do it. I told Pitti that I intended to play a little hand of my own. I was a little out of sorts and foolish, for I had forgotten that my tigress friend of years ago was a tigress still."

"She turned on you, eh?"

"In an instant. I was here before I could resist—carried down through old New York in a closed carriage."

"Where did she get you? How were you decoyed into her power?"

"It was as simple as breathing. I was asked to come to the Strawberry. You may not know where it is, nor what a trap the back rooms are."

"I was asked to meet the negotiator there, and I went—walked like a lamb to the slaughter. I was there on time, and entered the last stall in the back room. It is next to the door which leads down into the back yard, and beyond that yard at that particular hour stood a closed cab. The moment I entered the little stall something like a shawl was thrown over my head, and I was going down those steps to the rig."

"It was all over in a moment, and I found myself in the arms of a Samson who carried me as easily as he would a child."

"A man, you say?"

"Of course; for no woman could lug Babe Orell down those steps and across that old rubbish-filled yard. It was a man, I say, and though I never got to see his face, I believed that I had heard his voice before."

"Well, what happened next?"

"I went riding. Almost smothered in

one corner of that carriage, for my head was kept covered, I thought each moment would be my last. I never had such a ride before, and when it ended I was nearly dead. I came here in that manner, and here I've been ever since."

"Seeing no one?"

"Not a soul. My food is let down to me from overhead, and a trap-door is up there. Your food will reach you the same way, unless they want to starve you."

"But the voice of the man who carried you down those steps?" said the detective.

"I might be mistaken," said he. "One cannot be so very sure of anything nowadays. About three months ago I went to the bank—I don't go to banks very often—and there I had a check cashed. It was a bank in Wall Street, and the one where Winnie Shanks' husband is to be found every day."

"The Goldstone, eh?"

"That's it, the Goldstone. My money was handed to me by the cashier, a handsome fellow called Cook. He asked me if I could get any one to identify me, and I referred him to Mrs. Winnie Shanks. It happened that the old gentleman himself was in the private office, and when I mentioned his wife's name he came out, looked once over his gold-rimmed spectacles, and ordered the check cashed."

"But what has all this to do with the voice you heard at the Strawberry?"

"Everything," was the quick response. "The voice I heard at the bank and the one that saluted my ears when I went down those steps after being caught are identical."

"You don't mean to tell me that the gentlemanly cashier of the Goldstone Bank, Mr. Cook, had anything to do with your present imprisonment?"

"It may appear funny to you, but I can't get those two voices out of my head. But who did you say you were?"

"I am Tracy Trailer, a detective."

"Shut in over there for the purpose of pumping me?"

"Not at all, Mr. Orell. I am a prisoner like yourself, and it may be that the same causes which led to your misfortune had something to do with mine."

"I don't see how."

Trailer would have replied if a low "sh!" had not greeted him, and he held off.

A door seemed to open and shut, after which the man on the other side of the wall said:

"My breakfast's come."

"Oh, it's morning, then?"

"Yes, another day is here, and I want to get out of this den—this hole in the dark."

The detective echoed the desire from the depths of his own heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CUFF BUTTON AGAIN.

If Trailer the tracker could have looked beyond the wall which separated him from the man in the darkness there, and have possessed the eyes of the owl, he would have seen a queer-looking personage.

Babe Orell was a little man with a hunchback and the keenest of gray eyes.

His age would have been difficult to tell, for he looked old in face, while about him in other ways were the freshness and the suppleness of youth.

He fell to upon his breakfast with zest, for he had fasted a long time and needed food.

He did not return to the detective until he had cleared the plate of everything eatable, and washed it down with a bottle of ale which had accompanied the victuals.

"Now for liberty," said he.

He took from his bosom a gimlet, and went over to the wall again.

Detective Trailer heard him at work, and smiled.

"One gimlet-hole will do little good, but a great many may get us out of the trap," said he, certain that the man on the other side of the wall was listening.

"It is slow work, but we've got all day before us," responded the shadow.

"Aye, many days, perhaps."

The work of the little bit of steel was very slow.

Babe Orell bored nearly one hundred holes through the wall at different places.

It took work and rest.

He passed the hours in this manner, now and then exchanging hopeful words with the detective, and now appearing to give up the task altogether.

Slowly that day waned.

Would the man beyond the wall never complete his task?

Would the gimlet fail of liberation, and would he (Trailer) have to lose the trail and miss his quarry for want of an avenue of escape?

"I'm through now," said Babe Orell, at last. "I am going to test my work."

"Go ahead."

In another instant there was a slight noise, and a large piece of the wall fell at the detective's feet.

"Bravo!" cried Trailer. "You're a trump, Babe."

"Ain't I, though? Didn't I say I'd let you out of your cage if my hands and the gimlet held out?"

"You've done it!"

In another instant the detective felt a hot breath near him, and he grasped a hand in the dark.

It was a large hand, almost abnormally so, and the grip was like the closing of the fingers of an iron gauntlet.

"Where's your door? Mine seemed to be sheet iron on the other side, and it turns the gimlet point," said Babe Orell. "I would like to tackle your portal."

Trailer led him to the door, and he felt it with his hands.

"I don't know," he said, doubtingly.

"I am afraid this door is the counterpart of the one on my side of the house. But we'll try it. The gimlet point is nearly blunt, but we'll see. Here we go."

The detective of New York waited while his friend worked on the door, and for some minutes no noise was heard but the slight sound made by the little steel.

"It's all right. No iron here, or else I've happened to miss it," greeted the ferret's ears.

For an hour the gimlet was kept at work, and then Trailer was seized by the arm.

"What lies beyond this door I don't know," said Babe Orell. "It may be another cage, or it may be the pathway to safety. We'll risk it, eh?"

"Of course."

The big hands of Babe Orell broke out the piece of door which he had circled with scores of gimlet-holes, and laid it softly down.

"Shall I go first?" said he.

"Just as you please."

In another minute the detective heard the man wriggling his body through the door, and he followed him.

They passed down a narrow corridor to another door, which they opened without the assistance of the gimlet, and in a short time felt the breath of night on their faces.

For the first time now Trailer looked into the face of his strange deliverer.

"I'm no beauty, eh?" said Babe Orell.

"I would never take the premium at the beauty show, and I guess I'll never enter the lists for the red card."

"But you're all right, Babe. Here we are on the street. Come with me."

"Guess I will. Got no place to go just now, and I don't care about going back to the Strawberry."

Detective Trailer led the way to his own little den and unlocked the door.

It had been visited.

There was plenty of evidence that some one had "called" during his absence, for drawers had been opened, the furniture moved, and the room searched generally.

Passing on to the adjoining room, where his clothes were, the detective changed his suit and came back to the man waiting for him in the chair which he filled.

Babe Orell looked at him sharply.

"You're going to pay 'em back, ain't you?" he asked.

"Perhaps so."

"So am I. See here. Don't I know that I was sent to that house by orders from Winnie Shanks, the Pitti of the old bird-store? I am going to tell the people

that she used to be Mother Centipede's ward—"

"Not just yet," interrupted the detective, laying his hand on the man's shoulder.

"If I don't, you'll get in your work first, then where will my vengeance come in?"

"It will have its inning by and by. Just wait."

"All right, captain. But you'll let me go to the bank with another check won't you. Lord! How I'd like to astonish that cunning cashier. It would knock him silly at sight of me."

"That might be, Babe, but you must stand off a little while, and let me play my hand."

"Sergius Shanks married Pitti under the spell of her dark eyes. I know what they are. I'd just like to see the old gentleman and tell him what I know about the bird-store and its secrets. Wouldn't there be a profound sensation?"

Trailer left Babe Orell in his own quarters and went out.

Not long afterward he turned up in another part of the city, and Stafford, the teller, was startled to see him at his door.

It was quite late, and the two men sat face to face under a faint jet in Stafford's room.

Stafford told the detective about his trip to Philadelphia and his visit to the Shanks' mansion, which was followed by his call on Virga the Red with Tom Mattoon.

"So you didn't get into the house very far?" asked Trailer.

"No; that woman would have strangled me if I had persisted. I didn't want to die just yet."

"But the cry of the child in the other part of the house? Are you sure it was Nipsie's voice?"

"I would stake my life on it."

"Let us see."

They went out, and soon afterward ascended to the room occupied by Nipsie Atom.

The little place was locked and empty.

The child was gone.

For a moment Trailer, the ferret, stood nonplussed in the tenantless chamber, and then he turned suddenly upon his companion.

"Stafford, you love Miss Cook?" said he.

"I would give my life for her at any moment," said he. "Her refusal to see me went to my heart like a knife."

"That is a part of the game."

"But she cannot believe me guilty of the charge upon which I have been arrested."

"There is no telling what these women believe. They are strange creatures."

"But not Nina."

"You told me once, Stafford, that her brother, Cadmus is a mesmerist. That the girl falls easily under his influence."

"It is true, sir. I have seen her do the strangest acts while under the spell. Some of them were absolutely startling, and until I witnessed them I never believed in mesmerism."

"He never tried to 'spell' you, did he?"

"Several times, sir, but I successfully resisted him."

"Stafford, you will now recall the night of the robbery of the safe. You locked it according to a combination of your own?"

"I did."

"You went home afterward with that peculiar combination a profound secret."

"That is true."

"Has anything since ever occurred to cause you to suspect that you may have been robbed of that secret between your arrival home and the next morning?"

"There has. I may have shown you the cuff button. I have been so confused since the robbery that at times I don't appear to be accountable for my acts. Here it is."

The cuff button which Lucy the maid had found on the floor of Stafford's room was handed to the detective, and Trailer turned toward the light with it.

"You have seen a button like this, or similar in design before?"

"I have. Cadmus Cook used to have a pair like it, but since I come to think of it, he said one day about two weeks ago that he had lost one of the buttons. I remem-

ber that he looked about the bank for it, and then concluded that he had lost it on the street."

"Can you recall the exact day, Stafford?"

"I believe I can fix the exact date. I will try to fix it by another incident which does not have any bearing on the cuff button affair."

Stafford entered an adjoining room, and soon came back with a memorandum.

"On the same day that Cook professed to have lost the button I had a tooth extracted. Ah, here is my note of the latter incident—just two weeks ago this morning."

Tracy Trailer made no reply.

"You may keep the button," continued Stafford. "I do not care to become its keeper. There is something so terrible connected with thoughts of it—something that brings into play the name of the woman I love—that the button had actually made me shudder more than once."

"What do you think?" asked the detective.

"Don't ask me. It is terrible enough when one can keep it to himself. I am still under a cloud, and how I am to clear myself of the awful charge is yet one of the untried mysteries of the future. The man who robbed the safe is dead—that I believe. I have seen him at the Morgue. His lips are forever sealed. Whose tool was he? Who conspired with him? Cadmus Cook? Winnie Shanks? Mr. Trailer, I shall go mad if this cloud is not broken soon. I walk the streets regarded as a criminal. I am shunned by my old friends, as witness my experience on the ferry. Who holds the secret of the robbery and Buck Glare's murder?"

"I will tell you by and by," was the reply. "If I fail to unravel this dark mystery I will never again take a human trail. The world shall miss Trailer the Shadower."

CHAPTER XXII.

BLOOD WILL TELL.

Carmen, Mrs. Shanks' maid, lay in the hospital, whither she had been conveyed after her self-inflicted wound at the Strawberry.

Her hurt had been pronounced dangerous, if not fatal, and the unfortunate girl lay in a sort of stupor through the hours of the long night.

Morning came, and she still tossed restless, and now and then conscious, on the cot.

Mrs. Shanks had driven to the hospital to see her, and seemed relieved when she found the girl unable to recognize or address her.

It was the morning after Trailer's escape from the house, assisted by Babe Orell.

Winnie Shanks, neatly dressed, had tripped into the hospital, inquiring of the first person she met of the girl's condition, and asking to see her.

As she approached the ward where Carmen lay, a man who had noticed her slipped more into the background and kept his eyes fastened upon her.

This was no other person than Tracy Trailer, and it was the merest chance that he had seen Winnie Shanks first.

Not for a moment did the keen-eyed shadower lose sight of the banker's wife.

Mrs. Shanks did not tarry long at the girl's side. Those who watched over Carmen drew off and left the two women alone.

Winnie Shanks bent over the white face on the pillow, and for a moment seemed to regard Carmen with feelings of pity.

But Trailer, the tracker, saw more than the others.

He saw that the woman's lips were close to Carmen's ear.

He noticed that her lips moved, and that she seemed to be whispering to the wounded girl.

What was she saying, and did Carmen, in her semi-lucidity, understand?

At last Winnie rose, and for a moment remained beside the couch, looking down at its tenant.

When she withdrew Carmen turned her head and followed Winnie with her gaze until she had passed out of sight.

Then a deep sigh escaped the ashen lips.

Carmen turned her head away, and the detective saw her shut her hands.

What did that poor girl know?

What secret was she keeping for that handsome woman?

Why had Winnie Shanks come to the hospital to bend over the maid and whisper something into her ear?

It must be a guilty secret, and one whose keeping burned its way into Carmen's very soul.

The Gotham detective let Mrs. Shanks depart unmolested, though with a longing eye he followed her down the steps and out to her carriage.

Winnie Shanks went first to the Goldstone Bank, and afterward home.

In the parlor sat a visitor whom she had not expected to see.

He was a man well dressed, though his face was hard and dark, and his hands long and slender.

He sat in the arm-chair near the table with a good deal of coldness visible in his steel-gray eyes and about him the faint odor of tobacco smoke.

He heard the door open, heard the carriage stop before the house a few moments previously, and then with the utmost resignation he waited for Winnie to enter the parlor.

She stopped at the door and drew back a pace, but suddenly, as if determining to make the most of a bad bargain, she came forward, looking straight into her visitor's face.

"Good-morning," said the man, uncrossing his long hands in his lap. "You don't seem to know me."

"I know you now. Really, I didn't know—"

"Just how long I've been out, eh? Come! I don't like to see any one mince matters. I'm Gideon, you know."

"Yes, Gideon."

Mrs. Shanks' voice seemed to drop to a whisper, and she moved over to a chair and sat down.

There for a little while—perhaps three seconds—she watched Gideon Glare.

"What do you want?" she said at last.

"I want my brother."

There was no movement on Winnie Shanks' part; she only gazed on, her face becoming a little harder in expression, showing that she had wonderful control over her nerves.

"I don't know where he is," she said.

"He isn't at the Morgue now," said Gideon, with a slight chuckle. "He was there, you know."

"Not in that place?"

"Why, of course."

"But—"

"Let me talk on a little while. My brother Buck, whom I have not seen since I came down the river, has led, I am told, a wild life. There's no need of white-washing him. Let a man die as he has lived, and though Buck was my brother, I say that for him. But I want him."

Mrs. Winnie Shanks smiled.

"If he is dead, why, I can't restore him," said she. "What did he do?"

"He robbed your husband's safe."

There was a short cry, but it died on the woman's lips.

"It's this way, woman: If Buck hadn't robbed the safe he wouldn't have taken a trip to the Morgue."

"That was his own look-out."

"No, it wasn't. He was killed by some one who wanted the secret kept."

"I don't understand you. What secret was to be kept?"

"The deuce! You know. You have been a knowing person from the days when you were Pitti in Canal Street among the canaries and linnets."

There was a fading of color from the woman's cheeks, and she seemed to recoil in the chair.

"I want the papers. I want what Buck stole from your husband's safe."

"I can't hand them over, for I never saw the plunder."

"You did not? They never came into your hands, eh? Oh, no! You are as white as an angel at heart and as beautiful as a Georgian. You haven't lost the old Pitti smile and the old Pitti chirp."

Come, sing for me that little air you used to sing underneath the bird-store in the secret den, you know, where they made the rubies, and—and—"

Winnie Shanks was on her feet in an instant. She stood over Gideon Glare, with her eyes fastened upon him and her white hands clinched.

"You've come here to torture me. I know it. You must remember that I am not Pitti now."

"I know you're not."

"I'm not in the bird-store any more."

"You're in a palace."

"My husband's."

"You think of him some time, do you? Well, that's clever. You seem to go back to the old man whom you roped in for a purpose with your Pitti voice and Pitti smile. I told Mother Centipede when she let you go that you would make your fortune, and that we wouldn't get a dollar of it, no matter how much it was. Wasn't I right?"

There was no reply to these words, but all the time Mrs. Shanks was eyeing Gideon Glare like a falcon.

"I see I can't treat with you," said he, rising. "I will go to the other one. I will see what I can do there."

"You will go where?"

"To Conan, though that's not his name just now."

"You shall not."

"Then give me what I want."

"What's that?"

"I've told you—the things that were taken from your husband's safe by my dead brother."

Winnie Shanks stood statue-like before the tall man. She seemed to quiver, but only for a moment.

"How is he coming on? Convalescing, eh?"

Gideon Glare looked toward the door which Winnie had shut upon entering the room.

"I suppose you will want to tell me that he is in his dotage, that the idea he has that he was plundered by the man who left his finger in the steel safe is but a delusion."

She said nothing to this.

"You've told others this, why not me? You have given out that Sergius Shanks is becoming imbecile, and that he was robbed of nothing at all. Come, woman! don't say that in my teeth. You know that he was robbed, and you know what was taken from the drawer in the steel safe at the bank. Hand them over."

She shrank from him and seemed to reflect. The woman was thinking fast.

Not an inch did the man budge. He was looking at her with eyes that seemed to pierce her to the heart, and when she moved across the room he was still there.

"Don't leave this parlor!" suddenly thundered Gideon Glare. "Stay where you are!"

Winnie threw him a mad look, and stopped.

"How can I comply with your demand unless I leave the room?"

"Are they up-stairs?"

She was breathing hard now.

"Yes."

"Then I'll go with you."

He came forward and touched her arm.

"See here, Pitti, if you deceive me I'll come down upon your hopes like the Assyrian. I can do it, for, remember, I am Buck Glare's brother."

There was no reply, and Winnie Shanks, the banker's wife, only looked at him, but the look did not ask for pity.

"Go on, now," he went on.

She opened the door and motioned him into the hall.

"You were going with me, I thought you said?"

"So I am."

All at once the eyes of the woman got a ferocious gleam. They seemed to blaze with rage.

For half a second his back was turned toward her, and that was enough.

In an instant a dagger flashed in the morning light that came into the corridor, and as it was uplifted the left hand of Winnie pushed Gideon Glare against the wall.

She sprang at him like a tigress, with a half-suppressed cry of madness issuing from her throat.

He threw up his hands, but hers knocked them down, and then, summoning all her powers to aid her, she struck.

"Fool!" she cried. "You have sealed your own doom. You want what you shall never see."

Gideon Glare sank along the wall to the floor.

At the same time the tigress drew off and watched him.

She was Pitti again, the same Pitti educated in Mother Centipede's nest, and while she stood there and looked down into the whitening face of her victim, she seemed to gloat over what she had done.

"What a foolish play that was," said she, talking aloud to herself. "Now I wish I had Carmen here. I wish, too, that it was night, but I can wait."

She locked the front door, and then, coming back to Gideon Glare, she seized the body by the collar and dragged it down the hall.

The strength of a real tigress seemed to lie in her arms, and by and by she came back and tripped lightly up-stairs.

"I didn't live with Mother Centipede for nothing," she laughed. "I am proving worthy of the education I got in the old nest. But I must be Winnie again."

All day she waited in the house, seeing no one and hearing no sounds.

The shades of another night descended, and she slipped on a dark, close-fitting gown.

"I must see how the old bird is coming on," said she. "I must go back to the old nest."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOTHER CENTIPEDE IS ROBBED.

Mrs. Winnie Shanks did not call her carriage this time.

She slipped from the house and turned the first corner, walking on and on and losing herself, as it seemed, in a tangle of streets.

Some time afterward she reached Canal Street and hurried along it to the side door attached to Mother Centipede's den, where she knocked peculiarly.

In a little while the door opened a shade and the dark face of the bird-seller peeped out at the banker's wife.

Winnie crept forward and found herself in the corridor, which she had not invaded since fetching her husband down there when she was accompanied by Carmen.

"Is he here yet?" she asked, in a whisper.

Mother Centipede nodded and led Winnie to the end of the short passage, where she opened a door disclosing a number of steps.

The banker's wife went down and opened a portal at the bottom of the flight.

She was greeted with a cry from the end of the room which she had entered, and there arose before her the figure of her husband.

Sergius Shanks had changed since coming to that place.

He looked older and his voice quavered; his features were gaunt and his hands seemingly transparent.

Husband and wife were face to face.

"I have been waiting for you," said the banker. "I have thought that you might come and take me away from this place."

"You must wait a while."

"You said I should see the detective."

"So you shall—as soon as I can find him."

"Does it take you all this time to find that man, who ought to be found in half an hour?"

A cold, hard smile appeared on the woman's face and she turned her head away for a moment.

"I was robbed. You know that," continued the banker.

"All people do not want to believe that."

"But I could convince them in ten minutes. I was robbed of some documents, which, in the hands of my enemies, will work my ruin?"

"You only think so."

"Heavens!" cried Sergius Shanks. "I can prove it to you."

"I haven't time to listen now. I came to see that you were still safe and out of the way of those who could wrong you."

"Out of their way. It seems to me that I am in the toils of some infamous conspiracy."

"You don't think your wife is connected with it, Sergius?"

She came up to him and put her arms about his neck.

"I can't think that you are in the plot," said he, slowly. "But tell me why must I hide here? Don't they ask at the bank after me?"

"Mr. Cook fixes that all right."

"Cadmus Cook, ah!"

He seemed to finish the name with an inward shudder, and then, as if he suddenly recalled something, he swept one of his hands across his forehead.

"Where is Mr. Stafford?"

"At the bank."

"I want to see him. Tell him that I must see him."

"He shall be told."

"I have something for Mr. Stafford's ears. He has been arrested, but he is not guilty."

There was a quick start on the woman's part.

"Who told you that he has been arrested?"

"The paper yonder."

Winnie's eyes flashed as her gaze fell upon a paper lying on a table near by.

"Who gave you that paper, Sergius?"

"I sent out after it."

"Did the lady get it?"

"The lady? Don't you know that the woman who looks in here now and then is nothing but a bird-seller? I can hear the birds all the time."

A deep, dark frown came to Winnie's brows and she glanced half furiously at the door.

"They have arrested Mr. Stafford for helping to plunder the safe. He is innocent. He never entered into a conspiracy of that kind. He is above that."

"Then he will prove himself innocent."

"Unless those in the plot swear away his liberty. They do that thing nowadays."

"We will see that he has the best of legal help."

"Will you see to it, Winnie?"

She looked at him coolly and as coolly replied that she would give the matter her personal attention.

"That's a promise," said the banker. "Remember! Don't deceive me."

"Why should I, Sergius?"

"But send Mr. Stafford to me. If you do not I will get out of this place and astonish them all."

"Everything will come out all right in time. A few more days—"

"Days?" broke in Sergius Shanks.

"My God! Each one will be a cycle of time to me."

The banker's wife glanced at her watch and announced that she must go.

"Shall I see the detective?" pleaded the imprisoned man.

"Yes."

"The sooner the better. Sometimes I fear that I am going mad. What if the documents are used against me. But, hal! there are others which they did not get. Ah, there are the duplicates."

The woman turned ashen.

"The duplicates?" she almost shrieked.

"Yes, yes. You see I did not reckon without my host. Until last night, so worried have I been, I could not remember the exact hiding place of those duplicates. But now all is clear."

She looked at him like a tigress baffled; she drew off a pace and seemed to transfix him with her desperate gaze, and while she looked she did not appear to breathe.

"Aren't you afraid that the hiding place of those others might be discovered by the same enemy?" she asked.

"I am not. They are safe."

"They should be looked after. If some one found the papers in the safe why

might not the duplicates be discovered as well?"

For once Sergius Shanks was resolute and not to be cajoled by a woman.

"Let that be my secret."

"And lose them all?"

"I will take that risk, my dear. I will keep in my heart the secret of the treasury which no man shall rob."

She saw that it was no use to worry him over the matter.

"Good-by," said Winnie.

There was no kiss, no embrace, but a hard, cold separation and the gaze of Sergius Shanks followed her to the door and watched her shut it, turning the key in the lock from the outside.

For a moment he remained in the little chair where she had left him and then he sprang erect and crossed the darkened room.

"I watched her. I did it closely," said he. "I tried her and succeeded. I played a hand which she did not suspect and the cards came my way. I begin to see something now. Everything has been dark until now. I did not think I was capable of playing a hand like that and keeping my composure. The story of the duplicates captured her. What will happen next? In Heaven's name, why did I make that woman my wife?"

He waited until he heard a sound which seemed to tell him that the little side door on the sidewalk had opened and shut, and the next moment his knuckles struck the portal at which he stood.

Mother Centipede opened it.

"Where is she?"

"Gone," was the reply.

The door would have shut without another word if the banker of Wall Street had not placed his foot forward and prevented it.

"One moment, Vilola," said he. "You like money, don't you?"

The greedy eyes of Mother Centipede glittered.

"You would like to make a thousand dollars, wouldn't you?"

"Who wouldn't?"

"I have it for you. I have more than that if that is not enough. I will double the amount."

"What do you want done?"

"I want this letter delivered."

He pulled from his bosom a letter which he thrust forward.

Mother Centipede's eyes wandered to the superscription and settled there.

"It can't be so very far away. You can find the place and the man. It is to be delivered to no one but the person to whom it is addressed."

The woman held out her fat, dark hand and would have taken the letter at once, but it was withdrawn.

"Swear that he and no one else shall get it!"

"I swear. I will give it to him or fetch it back."

The banker entrusted the missive in her care and saw her hide it in her bosom.

When the door had been closed Mother Centipede ran up-stairs to her own dingy room, where the magpie chattered in his dirty cage.

She bent over a table and pulled forth the letter. She held it close to the lamp and looked at the name.

It was the name of Tracy Trailer, the detective, and his address was properly given.

Mother Centipede read it again and again and her fingers itched to see what was inside the little envelope.

It was a great temptation, one which she could not withstand, and her eyes sought out every dark place in the room before she went to the task which her evil heart approved of.

"Me see what he writes. Me see and sell secret twice."

She bent over the letter once more, her face getting more and more the expression of a female fiend's, and her fingers more of the movements of guilt.

"Me see and make two thousand. Him writes to the detective and—"

"Here, I'll take that letter to its destination!"

Mother Centipede started up and turned with blanched face.

Her breath was gone in an instant; her eyes seemed to bulge from her head.

Tom Mattoon was before her.

His long hands were reaching out for the letter. He was all eagerness and desire.

"No, no. Me keep it," cried the woman.

"Not if I know myself. Didn't you just say you intended to sell it and make two thousand? I guess I know something about your tricks. Ten chances to one that you even swore to deliver the letter, and here you talk about selling it."

Mother Centipede fell back, but the man was after her.

She was forced against the wall. Tom Mattoon held her there with one hand, while with the other he wrenched the sealed missive from her clutches.

"I'll deliver it myself and, by Jove! the right man shall get the right letter," cried Mattoon, as he bounded toward the half-open door, and the next moment a cry of rage told that the Italian lioness had been robbed.

Tom Mattoon vanished like a flash of light.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOTHER CENTIPEDE GETS EVEN.

Tom Mattoon intended to deliver Sergius Shanks' letter as soon as possible.

He saw that this would have to be done, else Mother Centipede might inform some one of her loss, and thus block the game of justice.

This was just what the woman in the bird store expected to do, and the thought lent speed to Mattoon's limbs.

He was not long reaching the little room inhabited by Tracy Trailer, but he received no answer to his eager raps.

The detective was not at home, and the man turned away disappointed, with the letter in his pocket.

He resolved to wait a while in hopes that Trailer would come back, and for this reason he stationed himself in a corner where he could see all who came to the door.

The night was not very far advanced and the ex-convict kept on the alert.

At last some one came up the flight of steps which led from the street and walked toward Trailer's room.

Tom saw him at once.

"'Tis he at last," he cried, but the next moment he fell back and again hugged his dark corner.

The man at the door was a little taller than the ferret and he stood at the portal leaning toward it while his face nearly touched the panel.

Finding that the door was locked and thinking that the detective was out, as indeed he was, the person so well watched by the ex-jailbird at last turned away and went down the stairs again.

This time Tom Mattoon dodged from his corner and put himself on the man's track.

Down on the street he did not have much difficulty in keeping his quarry in sight, and after half an hour's espionage he tracked him to a house on Madison Avenue, which he entered by means of a pass-key.

"So, Mr. Cook, you visit Trailer's room when you are not in the Goldstone," chuckled the man who had done the tracking. "Seems to me you are playing a dark little game with your false whiskers and your dark clothes. You pull your hat over your eyes and come out like the night-hawk. You slip along in the shadows of the buildings and try to prevent any one from recognizing you."

He had tracked the cashier from the detective's door to his own home and there the trail ended.

Tom watched the house a little while and then reluctantly went back.

Once more he approached the ferret's room and knocked softly.

No one yet.

"Confound it all, I'll have to wait till morning," said Tom. "I believe he ought to get this letter as soon as possible, but I can't stay here all night."

He went back to Canal Street.

It was not his intention to invade the bird store and come face to face with the lioness he had robbed.

The place was dark enough, but this did not prevent Tom from investigating a little.

He slipped round to the rear of the building and listened at a door which he seemed to find without much difficulty.

The place was quiet enough now.

There was not even a spark of light to show him that the store was inhabited, but all at once he was almost blinded by a flash and he staggered back with a faintly suppressed cry.

Tom Mattoon saw before him with a lamp in her hand the squat, unhand-some figure of Mother Centipede.

She had opened the rear door of the trap and was looking for something among the rubbish of the back yard.

Tom hugged the pile of boards among which he had suddenly thrown himself, but all the while he watched the woman like a hawk.

Mother Centipede still had a white, scared face, as if the robbery yet kept her ill at ease, and she shifted the light right and left, eager to see everything in the little yard.

The ex-convict was almost cramped to death by his situation, but he dared not stir.

"Maybe the scamp came back," he heard the woman say. "I heard a noise out here and—"

Just then Tom's foot slipped on a slanting board and the next moment one-half the pile came down over his head.

It was a crash that startled the woman and caused her to spring back, but at the same time she caught sight of the letter thief.

Mother Centipede recovered sooner than Tom did, and as the latter tried to pull himself out from the heap, he was seized by the collar and dragged into the house.

All this did not occupy a second of time, and when Mattoon looked up he saw the gloating face of Mother Centipede almost touching his.

"Back, are you?" cried the bird-seller. "I'll show you what it is to rob a lone woman after dark, I will. Oh, you mean-faced city hawk. I'll show you how to plunder lone and virtuous women."

Tom knew that no mercy would be shown him, and he thought of the precious letter which he carried in an inner pocket.

Mother Centipede raised the lamp over his head and for a moment threatened to dash it into his face.

"I'll break it over your head and set ye afire," she screeched. "Where is the letter?"

Tom shut his teeth hard.

"I've delivered it!"

"Oh, you did, now? You took it to him, did you? You lie!"

Tom was equal to the occasion, and, rising despite the woman's foot, which had been placed on his breast, he looked at her with a good deal of defiance.

"Come, give it up. You've got it yet, else why would you be crouching in my back yard?"

"If you want the letter you will have to get it from him—not from me, mother. I told you that he should have it and he got it long ago."

She looked at him with the glare of a tigress in her eyes and raised the lamp again.

"I'll baptize ye with burning oil."

The crisis was at hand, and Tom Mattoon realized the full import of his peril.

He dashed the foot aside and scrambled to his feet. He made a spring toward the uplifted hand and caught the arm just as it was about to come down with the lamp.

He pushed Mother Centipede toward the wall while she clung to the lamp, on the eve of being dropped every moment, and there he managed to hold her.

"Open your mouth again and I'll choke you to death."

She felt the hands at her throat sink deeper into it and for half a minute she fully expected to perish there.

But all at once Tom loosened his clutch. Mother Centipede, well choked, got loose and was forced to set the lamp on a table.

"Where is he?" asked Tom.

"Where's who?"

"Why, the person who gave you that letter?"

Mother Centipede crossed herself.

"You don't know, eh? Is that the game?"

"I got it this morning from a friend, but I was so busy in the store that I hadn't time to attend to it sooner."

"You don't expect me to believe that? Mother Centipede, I have known you for years and I guess I know you pretty thoroughly. Come, tell me where he is."

"I can't tell you, sir."

"Can't, eh? Then you mustn't think hard of me if I search the nest."

The woman lost color and came toward Tom with ashen lips.

"Don't do that. You'll disturb the birds."

"When did you take such an interest in the birds? Why, I've seen you wring the neck of a parrot because it wouldn't sing or repeat a song for one of your customers. I'll disturb the birds if it's necessary, but I'll search the trap, all the same."

Tom Mattoon moved toward the door which opened into the store proper, with the woman at his heels.

She was waiting her chance, was this creature of the night. She was getting ready to prevent the man from searching her store, and with clinched hands and blazing eyes she slipped after Tom, all the time saying that if her canaries were disturbed they would not be any good for customers on the morrow.

Suddenly Tom Mattoon paused and turned toward Mother Centipede.

"There might be more than a thousand a piece for us. Come, Vilola, let's make a bargain."

"How?"

"Let's bleed 'em all around. We can do it. In the first place, there's Pitti, and then there's the other."

"What other one?"

"The cashier."

"I don't know him."

"But I do. It's just the game for us. You remember how Pitti used to be the little seraph of your old nest. She's feathered her nest and—"

A slight noise at the other end of the room startled Mother Centipede and she looked in that direction, for the moment totally ignoring Tom Mattoon.

"It's only a bird—a parrot talking in his sleep," said the ex-convict.

Mother Centipede was not satisfied.

She glided down the narrow aisle and stooped in a certain spot.

Tom heard her say something in low tones, and in another moment he was there. But all at once she roused herself like a wild beast and pushed him back.

"It wasn't a parrot, eh? I must have been mistaken. I thought I saw a face down there near the floor. Was he trying to get out, Mother Centipede?"

She made no reply, but Tom was not satisfied. He went forward again, but the following moment Mother Centipede snatched a parrot's cage from the counter and dealt him a heavy blow with it.

The bird screamed, which seemed to set all the other feathered inmates of the place to chattering, and for a time there was a perfect pandemonium, while Mother Centipede continued to beat Tom Mattoon with the cage and its startled occupant.

Tom tried to defend himself against such a novel attack, and the more he did so the harder became the battle and while he was forced to retreat, the birds increased their bedlam.

"I'll kill you with the parrot!" cried Mother Centipede.

Tom was driven to corner by the lively onslaught, and while warding off a blow he was thrown backward by tripping on something he had not seen, and in another moment he seemed to be falling down through a trap.

When he recovered he was in the midst of profound darkness and half stunned.

His first thought was of the letter. It was gone when he felt for it.

"Oh, I'll find him anyhow," said he. "I can get out of this nest, black as it is."

He found a barred window; he tore down the bars, which proved old and rotten, and half a minute later he stood in the starlight, the only living thing in the little back yard.

He had had adventures enough for one night.

CHAPTER XXV.

TRAILER FINDS HIS LITTLE FRIEND.

The dare-devil detective of New York, after his last talk with Harley Stafford, resolved to investigate the affair of the child's cry in the house of Virga the Red.

Stafford was positive that it was Nipsie's voice, and the absence of the little girl from her room in the tenement had convinced Trailer that some one had played a dark hand not only against her, but against the cause of justice.

Tom Mattoon might have found the detective at home but for his interest in little Nipsie, and, knowing where to find the house visited by the teller and Tom, he was on that trail.

It was not far from ten when Virga the Red heard some one at her door, and when she opened it she was greeted by a man.

Eagerly the woman leaned forward to inspect the face not very plain in the semi-darkness, and when she had seen that it was to her a face totally strange, she was about to shut the portal and not admit her caller.

But Trailer pushed past the woman and entered against her will.

In the hall he turned and looked at her.

"Oh," said he, "I know you now."

"You know me," returned Virga. "You seem to have the advantage this time."

"Perhaps I do. But you're Milly Blondin."

There was a slight start and a quick cry, and Virga fell against the wall, staring at the detective.

"Who are you?"

"Never mind that just now, Milly. Old times come back while I look at you. Don't you remember how you used to sing in light parts in the old Musee?"

"Don't I?" cried the woman, suddenly carried away by the recollection.

"I've heard you many a time, Milly. What are you doing here?"

"Keeping house and living quietly."

"All alone?"

"Yes, it's best, you see, sir."

"Just so. But you shouldn't be alone, Milly. You've got stouter since the days of the Musee. You're a good deal plumper than when you used to trip out upon the little stage and sing to the discordant tunes of Signor Matti's piano."

"Signor Matti? You knew him, too, did you?"

"Who didn't that went to the Musee?" cried the detective. "He was a queer little fellow. I saw him the day he was taken from the river by the harbor patrol. Poor Matti!"

The woman heaved a sigh, whether for the dead pianist or the days which her visitor had recalled Trailer did not know, and then she fell to talking about other times. Trailer indulged her. The meeting had been most opportune, for he had not expected to recognize in Virga the Red the singer of the vaudeville stage of years ago.

"I say, Milly—I can't help calling you that, you see—I say, would you mind giving me a look at your little companion?"

"My—little—companion?" she suddenly gasped.

"Of course. I understand that you don't care to have the outside world know that you're not living altogether alone, and I thought I would like to see her."

"But, really, sir—"

"Oh, come, Milly. That's all right. You have to make money somehow, and as the days of the Musee are over, you have to pick up an honest penny wherever you can."

There was no reply, the woman falling

back in her chair and looking at the ferret from beneath her bushy brows.

If she had once been pretty, she was so no longer. Years and perhaps a little dissipation had done the work for her, and her face, which was large and quite coarse, coupled with the dark red hair, rendered her one of the poorest specimens of beauty to be found in the great city.

The detective waited for her to speak, but as she did not he came back to the charge.

"Is she in yon room, Milly?" he asked, glancing at a door across the chamber.

"You must excuse me, sir, if I refuse to answer your question."

"Oh, come, Milly. I can make it of more worth for you to serve one of your old admirers than the other person. I have come to see the child, and—"

Just then some one beyond that very door rapped upon it, and the woman lost color.

"She's there," cried Trailer. "You must let me see her, Milly."

The woman rose, and at the same time the ferret did the same thing.

He started toward the door, and never minded the woman breathing hard in the middle of the room.

"You must not prevent me. I am going to see your companion. She is beyond that door. Will you open it, Milly, or shall I break it down?"

The slight scream which bubbled to her lips was broken by the detective, who drew his figure up and gazed at the closed portal in a menacing manner.

"Don't!" cried the woman. "I'll open the door."

"That's all right, Milly."

Virga the Red moved toward the portal and played for a moment with the lock.

As she swung the door open the detective caught sight of a little thing in dresses, and a moment later he held Nipsie Atom in his arms.

The child put her arms round the ferret's neck and kissed him in her gratitude.

"You've come to take me away from here, haven't you, Trailer?" cried the child.

"Trailer? My God!"

This cry came from Virga's throat, and she fell back, looking at the detective, who faced her with his burden in his arms.

"She's not been harsh with me after the first night," said the child. "Then she said I was to remain here forever and never see Dick, the Hartz canary, any more. But since then her heart has softened a little, and I've fared pretty well."

"I had to do it, sir. You don't know, sir, what I've passed through since I left the Musee. You won't take me out there for keeping the child, will you?"

"Who made you take her in?" asked Trailer. "In whose power are you?"

"Don't make me tell."

"Tell the truth, Virga," said Nipsie.

"Who fetched you to this house, Nipsie?"

"I hardly know. I will have to think first," was the reply. "I can't think of everything at once. You know that, Trailer."

"You were brought here from the nest?"

"Yes, yes. I remember that my door was open soon after Bantam went to see who had moved the curtain in the fatal window in Castle Norway, and I saw a man before me. Then he looked at me, and I seemed to become drowsy, and when I came out of the sleep I was here, and Virga yonder was talking to me."

"This is true, Milly?"

"It is true, but don't give me all the blame."

"Who fetched the child to you?" demanded Trailer.

"Let me keep that. My life won't be worth a candle's snuffing if I betray him."

"You might trust me, Milly."

"But in trusting you I anger him."

"Very well," said the detective, turning away with Nipsie in his arms. "The child goes with me, and you will have a settlement with him when he finds it out."

There was a cry on the woman's part, and she came after Trailer.

"Don't let me face him. I know what he will do. I have been in his power."

"You must face him, I say."

"Tell Trailer the truth, Virga. Don't keep both of us in suspense. You know the man."

But Virga the Red stood statue-like before the ferret, looking into his face while she scarcely seemed to breathe herself.

"I cannot—I dare not!" she cried.

Trailer started toward the door, and caught the latch.

"I'll find him," he said, looking over his shoulder at her. "You must not think, Milly, that this man who abducts little children can long escape me."

"I trust he will not. I hope you will find him and bring him to justice; but I dare not betray him."

Trailer was on the street with his little charge.

He took her to his own room and set her in a chair where he saw the old smile come back to her face and where he listened to her story in detail.

Nipsie could recall a good deal about her abduction. She remembered the man who came to her room, and who had asked her a good many questions which she could not remember.

She described him as well as she could to the detective, but Trailer knew that the man was disguised, and told Nipsie so.

She fell asleep on a sofa in the ferret's room, and after midnight Trailer heard a footfall outside his door.

Springing from the chair where he had been dozing he crossed the room and pausing at the portal.

Suddenly he saw something white slipped underneath the door and into his room.

He watched it as it came in silently, knowing well that there was a hand behind it.

It was a letter for him, and when he heard the footstep quit the door he picked it up and leaned toward the subdued light.

In another moment the trailer of Gotham had broken the seal and was reading:

"Trailer—I dare not betray that man, therefore I will seal my lips forever. Take good care of the little girl, and don't let her fall again into that man's hands. She knows one of his secrets, and if she is kept away from him she will become a famous woman, for she is a sweet child whom I could not mistreat after I came to know her. Think of me, Trailer—recall Milly, of the old Musée, and when you look at me in the Morgue remember that I had to keep his secrets under pain of death. MILLY."

Trailer looked at Nipsie, sleeping like a log on the sofa.

Crunching the letter in his hand, he ran over to her and listened to her deep breathings a full minute.

"She's safe here," said he. "She can keep house half an hour asleep."

He opened the door and sprang out into the hall, locking the portal as he shut it; then he went down the steps three at a time, and gained the street.

Milly, or Virga, was out of sight.

In a little while Detective Trailer was pushing toward the river not far away, and suddenly he ran almost against a figure as it dodged for a second into the light.

It was Milly, hooded, but Milly, all the same.

She did not see him, and when she had waited for the watched policeman to get out of her way, she was moving again.

Trailer hastened forward, and in a minute had come up with her.

Milly, or Virga, stopped at sound of his footsteps, and uttered a cry.

"Were you awake? If I had thought that you should have had no letter."

"Awake and watchful, Milly. Come back to my room where the little one is. You're safe there."

"But you will make me betray him."

"You may keep your secret. I shall never ask you again for it."

She gave him a long, deep, penetrating look; her bosom rose and fell with exciting passion, and all at once her face brightened as she exclaimed:

"I'll trust you, Trailer. I'll go back."

They went back together, and when the detective had opened the door to Virga, he pointed to the sleeping child, and said:

"Keep her company. I can trust you now, Milly. You need not betray that man, but I will see that he never turns like a serpent upon you."

Then he went out again, smiling to himself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LEAF FROM THE PAST.

Cadmus Cook, the cashier of the Goldstone Bank, sat alone at a small table in the well furnished parlor of the house on Madison Avenue, tenanted by Nina and himself.

The hour was past ten on the same night that has just witnessed the events of the preceding chapter, and there was a strange quiet in the street beyond the doors.

Strikingly handsome and neat in his personal appearance, the cashier was one to attract attention anywhere, and on this occasion, the sole inhabitant of the parlor, with a cigar between his white fingers and a bottle of wine on a porcelain tray near at hand, he looked at peace with all mankind.

If he was expecting a caller, he did not betray it in any manner, but when foot-steps came down the stairs in the hall and the swish of garments saluted his ears he looked up and fell to watching the door.

Perhaps he knew who was out there, for as the seconds crept away his gaze became more and more intent; and when he saw the door opened slowly and without noise he smiled faintly. Nina came in.

The past few days had robbed the fair girl of some of her ruddiness of color, and her face seemed thinner and a great deal whiter. Nina had suffered.

Watched by the cashier, she came forward and stopped beside the table.

Cadmus Cook turned his gaze upon her and looked without parting his lips.

"Will you tell me the truth now?" asked Nina.

"The truth? Will you continually harp on that ever since that man crept into this house and whispered something in your ears?"

"You don't know how it has embittered my life. You don't know how I cannot sleep on account of it."

"Pshaw! You are enough to worry a man of better nerves than I possess."

"I don't want to worry you. I only want to know if that man told the truth."

"What do you think? You are ready to believe him, I suppose?"

"I would prefer to believe you."

"Sit down. Don't stand there, or you may become tired before I am through," said he, and Nina, still watching him, dropped into a chair.

The cashier took a long breath; he seemed to be considering an important matter, for all the time he was watching Nina like a hawk.

"If you think you must know, you shall."

"It will kill me sooner not to know than to know."

"That's only a notion, but you shall know."

"A good many years ago there lived in this very city a woman who foolishly wedded against her parents' will. She was a young and handsome girl, with eyes a good deal like yours, by the way, Nina."

"The marriage turned out to be a bad one, and the husband at last, thanks to the police, got to see the inside of Sing Sing."

"The wife, after her husband's arrest, opened a little store, and subsisted for a spell, but the ban of crime was upon her as well, and one night they found her dead in the little back room of the trap, with no one near her but her only offspring, a little girl."

"For some time, years, I may say, the child vanished completely. No one seemed to know what had become of her, and no one seemed to care. I doubt if there was a single soul in the city who would have turned his hand for information concerning little Linnet, as the child was called, on account of her voice."

"But she did not follow the fate of her mother. The father died in prison, and the

family passed out of notice, but the child did not die."

"She simply fell into the hands of a family who looked a little after the mother on account of some distant relationship, and the child grew up under their care, fostered, though she knew it not, by this household."

"I now bridge some years with a single sentence. I will inform you, Nina, that you are that child."

Nina's face lost color, and she remained motionless in the chair.

"Do you care to hear everything?"

"Everything."

"Then I will come to the end at once. You are the only living representative of that felon father and suspected mother. You are no relative of mine. You have been called the sister of Cadmus Cook, but you are not so. I have sheltered you rather than see you pass out into the world nameless or to go back and take the name your parents wore."

"What was that name?"

"Glare," was the answer.

Nina leaned toward the cashier.

"I thank you," she said, coldly. "I thank you for at last breaking the seal of mystery which has for years shaded my life. I have felt that I was a human puzzle. I have feared that I was not Nina Cook, yet to-night I thank Heaven that I do not bear your name."

He gave her a haughty look, and his thin lips were wreathed in sarcastic smiles.

"Where would you go if you were to quit this house to-night?" he asked.

"I do not know, but don't let my future disturb your thoughts," she answered, quickly.

"You have other relatives. Your father was not the only Glare in this city."

"Perhaps not."

"There were others, but they did not always pass under their real names. You remember the late robbery of our bank?"

"How could I forget it? You have told me that Harley Stafford, arrested for complicity in that crime, is guilty. You know that he is not."

"You assume a good deal, Nina. I suppose if you were to go out yonder you would foolishly try to prove his innocence."

"It shall be proved, whether I do it or not. Not your brother? No blood in my veins like that in yours? I thank you for the narrative, Mr. Cook. What can you say of your own antecedents, after covering mine with obloquy?"

She was looking him straight in the eyes fearlessly, and with calmness, and he saw that her hands were clinched in her lap.

"Dare you insinuate that I have a darkened pedigree? Be careful, woman! The door of this house may open for you a little sooner than you care to see it."

"It shall open this minute," cried Nina, rising, and sweeping forward. "You need not shelter me a moment longer. I will go back to the Glares if necessary, and I dare say there is better blood there than in your lineage."

Cadmus Cook watched her from the depths of his chair, and saw her hand open the door.

"Are you really going?"

"This minute."

He drew from his pocket a roll of bills, which he tossed toward her, saying:

"I would not send you out into the world penniless."

The money fell at her feet, but she disdained to stoop and pick it up.

"Time may come when you will need the smallest bill in the lot," he observed.

"And when you may need them all," was the answer which she flashed back at him.

His reply was very brief, for Nina had shut the door and was gone.

He listened, fully expecting to hear her ascend the staircase, but was not rewarded, for Nina marched straight from the house and vanished down the sidewalk.

Cadmus sat in a sort of stupor for some time after the girl's departure.

He struck a match for his cigar, but allowed it to go out without lighting the Habana, then, suddenly rising, he threw

the stump into the grate and paced toward the door.

"Aha, she's coming back," he cried, as the doorbell rang. "I will tell her a little more. I will make the separation complete."

He stepped into the hall and opened the door.

Some one sprang into the house, and, throwing back a veil, revealed the white face of Mrs. Shanks.

"You?" cried Cadmus. "I thought Nina was coming back to her mutton."

"No; it is I! See here—are we alone?"

Her gloved hand clutched him by the sleeve, and she almost dragged him toward the parlor door.

"We are alone now," said he, shutting the door, when they found themselves in the room. "What is it?"

"It is terrible! I have seen him!"

"It is just like you women—always seeing a ghost. You've seen your husband, have you?"

"No—no! He's safe enough. But I've seen the detective."

"Nonsense!"

"But it could have been no other."

"Where have you been?"

"Down-town."

"What took you down-town at this hour? Don't you know that your place was at home?"

"Yes, yes. But that lurking fear that all was not right down there drove me thither. I could not help going out. I thought something was wrong."

"Vilola was to tell you if there was, eh?"

"I know that."

"Then, in the name of common-sense, woman, why didn't you stay at home?"

"I have told you," cried Winnie, snapping out the words in quick succession. "But I have seen him. He has escaped."

"Impossible!"

"Go and see! I will keep house for you? Where is Nina, did you say?"

"Out yonder, with the dream broken. I have told her the truth. She wanted to know, and, by Jove! I thought the time had come to tell her."

"That was good. I wanted you to do it before, you know. But go out and see if he is safe. I won't move till you come back."

Cadmus Cook hurried from the room and went to his own apartment. In a few minutes he came back in another costume, with his face covered with a darkish beard, which effectually changed his cast of countenance.

"You're all right now. The keenest ferret of the whole lot would pass you a hundred times without suspecting."

She was soon alone.

For a little while she rocked back and forth in the chair, and then went to the window.

The slats of the inner shutters were parted a trifle, and she pressed her white and anxious face against them.

Suddenly she seemed to recoil, for in the shadow of the tree in front of the house was a dark figure, which, from the first, secured and kept her gaze.

Winnie grew desperate as she watched the figure there.

She turned her head away a moment, but when she looked again it was still there.

"I'll fix the spy," she suddenly hissed. "I am not to be trifled with in this manner. I am not to be watched like a common thief."

She went over to a desk in one corner of the room and took from it a revolver.

Gripping it tightly, she came back to the window, raised the sash without noise, and, thrusting the weapon forward, fired straight at the object against the tree.

There was a quick cry, and a figure vanished down the street.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEFORE THE STEEL SAFE AGAIN.

On a certain corner where flared a light blown by the winds of Gotham stood a house, apparently untenanted.

It was a three-story structure, old and

out of style, but it stood on valuable ground, for it was in the heart of New York.

The broad, old-fashioned door was set back from the step, and its brass knob still further gave the place a look of age and dilapidation.

This house belonged to Sergius Shanks, the president of the Goldstone.

The banker had invested a good deal of his money in old houses, which, while they were not worth much themselves, stood on valuable ground, which increased in richness all the time.

Toward this house, which we have to some degree located, Cadmus Cook made his way after parting with Winnie Shanks.

No one would have suspected that the bearded man slipping down through Gotham was the man who daily paid thousands over the marble counter of the Goldstone, and in the searching eyes no one would have seen the cashier's look.

Cadmus Cook walked fast. He had a way of keeping out of the light that would have done credit to the shrewdest police-deceiving crook, and after a long tramp, he drew up before this old house.

Dodging into the shadows of the house itself he opened the door and entered.

The cashier took good care to shut and lock the door after him.

He struck no light, but found his way without one to the staircase and thence to the end of the dark hall.

There was a door there which yielded to the key which he produced from his pocket, and in another moment the man was descending a flight of narrow steps.

"The door is open!" burst from him, the first audible words he had spoken since quitting Winnie Shanks. "She may have seen him after all."

Then for the first time he lit a match.

The flame showed him not only an open door, but one with a bored panel, which told him how some one had escaped.

"Both gone—the detective and Winnie's enemy," he went on. "She was right. She saw him."

He did not tarry in the old house.

He rushed up the stairs after throwing his match to the floor and stopped in the hall.

"What next? Shall I go back to her at once or see how Virga comes?"

He concluded evidently to do the latter, for after carefully letting himself out of the house, he walked in another direction than toward the one from which he had come.

He nearly crossed the city before he paused and then jerked a bell.

This time he was not answered, for the door did not open.

"Fast asleep, eh? She said she would let me in at any time. I will call to-morrow night."

Back down the steps he went and vanished for a spell.

Meantime, the woman who had fired at the man against the tree was waiting nervously for him.

"It seems to me," thought Cadmus Cook, "that I might find out something about his rooms."

He turned the first corner, walked faster than ever, and ran up a flight of steps near Broadway.

Fate was against the cashier that night.

Traller's door did not yield him anything, though if he had opened it he might have started back with a wild cry, for Milly and little Nipsie were sleeping there in each other's arms.

He was off again.

At one time if he had looked back he might have seen the shadow which moved with his, though at a respectful distance from him; he might have singled out the man who, keeping in the shadows of the buildings, kept him in sight all the time.

It was a tracker to be feared, a man with the tread of a cat and the agility of a leopard.

Cook kept on. He turned into Wall Street at last.

He had the keys to the little door which let thousands into the Goldstone during

the day—one of the smallest banks in the city, but none were better known.

Watching his opportunity, Cadmus dodged at the door, unlocked it and passed in in a moment.

He passed at once to the private office, where he found the curtains down and the revolving chair at the president's desk.

The sole side window of this little office looked out upon an alley of narrow dimensions, but it was closed and an iron burglar-proof shutter barred the way to light.

Cadmus pulled the chair from the desk and sat down.

He turned his face toward a small safe standing in one corner of the room. It was the same safe which had caught and held the robber's finger, and since the robbery it had been removed to where it now stood.

Turning on the electric light, for he knew that not a ray of it could reach beyond the office, he rolled the chair toward the safe, which he opened.

He could do this, for it had been repaired since the robbery and he had locked it last himself.

The steel doors made no perceptible noise as he threw them back, and he looked first at a dark stain on the inner coping of the doors.

It was the blood of the burglar—the gore of the man who slept in an unknown grave, murdered, as we have seen, in the upper room of Castle Norway, across the alley from Nipsie Atom's window.

Cook took from the safe a lot of papers, which he ran over carefully.

He spread them out on the desk in order that he could look over them better, and his eyes searched out every line in them in silence.

When he had done this he put all back but one, and this paper he transferred to his inner pocket.

Once more he went back to the safe.

There were bonds and notes there, but he spurned all such things.

He did not touch one, as if money was not his object.

He opened drawer after drawer, looking into each and now and then thrusting in his hand and feeling for that which his eyes did not see.

"We must tighten the screws a little, just a little," he said, as he shut the safe doors. "The time has come for that. It must be done right and there must be no mistake."

As he rose he looked toward the window and remained motionless in his tracks for half a second. No one was there.

Cadmus Cook knew that no one could look through shutters of iron, and he therefore felt himself safe.

But something seemed to attract him toward the window, which was supplied with a drab curtain, pulled down on its roller.

Ah, he saw what it was now.

There was the faint marks of fingers there.

He wondered why he had not seen them before. He could not contrive how they had escaped his eye.

With more than passing curiosity he bent forward and looked closely.

There they were, finger marks on the curtain. Had the burglar made them?

If so, he must have left the impress of his fingers before the safe caught him, for there was no bloody finger mark.

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Cook. "I am getting flurried, and yet I call myself a man of nerve. That's nothing but the marks of the sweeper's hand and—"

His hand was on the catch of the office door, when he turned and looked across the little room.

No, the noise was not there. It sounded more like it was in the outer room.

He moved toward the door again.

He opened it and stopped as if the dead had risen in his path-way. A man stood there.

In the electric light, which he was going to turn out as the last act before quitting the office, he saw this person from head to foot.

Where had he been hiding all this time? In the bank?

There came over the cashier a feeling of terror, yet at the same time he remembered that he was armed.

For a full minute face to face these men stood, the one white about the eyes, the other dark of skin, keen-eyed and watchful.

Neither spoke, as if looks were speeches enough.

Cook held the door open and into the office passed the stranger. Then for the first time he spoke.

"I thought you would come, and, above all places, I've been waiting to meet you here."

"Well, I'm here."

The cashier waited for the other to proceed, and while he waited he shifted his position so as to put himself between the man and the door.

"What do you want?" he asked at last.

"You ought to know," was the reply. "I want my brother."

It was the same demand a cool, calculating man had made of Winnie Shanks in the elegant mansion on the Avenue.

"You want your brother, do you? Am I his keeper?"

"Open the door of that little safe, will you?"

"Why should you ask me to do this?"

"I want you to see the blood stains on the inside, and then I want to hear you say that again, 'Am I your brother's keeper?'"

Cadmus did not reply.

The man was thinking fast, and he was regarding the stranger from beneath his beetling brows, and waiting, tiger-like, for his time.

"You will not? Very well. Open the safe, anyhow."

"I cannot."

"Come! You had it open a while ago. You were in here for thirty minutes and the doors were open. Cadmus Cook, I am here to demand the opening of those doors."

One foot was thrown forward, and as it slid over the velvet carpet of the little office, Cadmus looked down and saw it.

"Do I look like Buck did?" smiled the man into whose face he was gazing. "We were twins. But, come, open the safe."

The cashier moved toward the corner where it stood, but he stopped before he reached it.

"I give you one minute."

"Do you want to rob us?"

"To rob the Goldstone? That's the last thing I want to do. You will open the safe now?"

Biting his lip nearly through, the cashier of Wall Street opened the steel doors and turned upon his visitor.

"Which drawer were they in?" asked the man.

Cadmus Cook designated a little drawer, saying:

"He says they were in there, but no one believes him."

"They don't, eh? They don't believe that Sergius Shanks lost anything when the safe was looted? You know better than that."

"I?"

"Of course; you and the woman know better than that. As I have said, I don't want to rob the safe. But you will put your hand between the doors as I move them together."

"It would dismember me."

"Exactly. That's just what I want to do—maim you till death, as he was maimed. Quick, Cadmus! It won't be night always! Put your fingers in there."

There was a wild cry which seemed to have been torn from the cashier's throat, and the next instant, in spite of the menace of hand and eye, he sprang tigerishly at the man who confronted him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BREAKING OF A SPELL.

The man who had surprised Cadmus Cook in the bank awaited the onset with an unruffled countenance.

He braced himself, as the cashier sprang at him, and caught the arms that came out to throttle him.

"It's a game which two can play at," was the welcome. "I am here on business, Mr. Cook, and you shall not kill me until I have completed it, and not then, I guess."

The enraged cashier found that he had met his match, for he was thrown half-way across the room, and in another minute his body had been crushed down into the revolving chair, while the other stood over him.

"Don't you see that it's a double game?" laughed the dark-faced man, savagely. "You can't overcome me as easy as you cash checks at the counter out there. I should say not! Won't you have a cigar?"

The very coolness of this man was aggravating, and the cigar which was extended as he spoke, the white-faced cashier brushed aside.

"That much saved," observed the other. "We'll talk now. You don't care to have your hand between the doors of the safe there? What did you think when you saw the finger which was left there a few mornings ago? Did it turn you white? Not likely, eh? But you knew where to find the man who lost that finger, and you found him."

"It is false!" cried Cadmus Cook.

"Well, we won't argue that point. I'll take the papers."

"You have the safe before you. There are a good many valuable papers there."

"But not the ones in question—not the ones Sergius Shanks lost the night of the burglary."

The cashier said nothing, but fastened his peculiar mesmeric gaze on the man before him. Could he spell this man?

It was worth trying. He had powers which had overcome the strongest men—why not this cool-head?

The man smiled as if to say "Your game won't work, Cadmus Cook," but he at last began to show signs of weakening.

The powers were indeed succeeding, and the cashier threw all his soul into the cast of the dice of fate.

If he failed he was lost; he realized that.

"Sit down," he said to the man before him.

The stranger obeyed, for he took a chair opposite the cashier and looked at him half-dreamily.

Cook did not breathe now; he put out his hand and passed it close to the other's face.

Indeed, he touched the face softly, but its owner did not stir.

"Where are you?" he said.

"In my old cell. I see the bars and the stone walls."

"Why don't you walk out? The door is open for you."

"Open? I see now. Who opened it?"

"I did."

"You are very kind. I will never forget you. I am out now, the first time in years."

"Yes, you are a free man. Come with me! We will go back to the city and you can see your old haunts again."

A moment's silence followed his last word and he continued to watch the man who had come to plunder him.

"I will go with you," he went on, confident of his powers. "Come! We will quit this place. The night is pleasant out, and we can walk together."

Slowly, all the time watched like a tiger by Cadmus Cook, the man rose, and they walked through the little office together, the cashier letting them out of the bank proper and upon the sidewalk.

"This man must be destroyed," decided Cadmus to himself. "He is more dangerous than a serpent. If I can hold him half an hour in my grip I will not have him to fear."

For thirty minutes? Could he do it?

Side by side they walked away, and those who met them at that hour did not recognize the cashier, nor see that the man walking at his side was in the power of a fiend.

Cook thought rapidly.

His right hand held the other's wrist in a grip like that of steel manacles, and thus he kept him in his subtle power.

Ten, twenty minutes passed, and they were still together.

"Can I hold him a while longer?" asked the cashier of himself. "It is almost as good as catching the detective! Five minutes more of this spell and I conquer!"

They walked a little faster now, urged on by the cashier, and at length he ran up the steps of his own home.

He had carried his prisoner a long distance from the bank, but had succeeded.

He had left Mrs. Shanks, the banker's wife, at the house to wait for him, and he wondered if she had remained at her post or had gone home, a little farther down the Avenue.

When he found himself in the hallway, with his hand still on the wrist of the culprit he had subdued, he passed rapidly to the parlor door and turned the knob.

As they had entered noiselessly, he opened the door softly and looked in.

Some one was sleeping in a chair underneath the light. It was Witch Winnie.

Cook glanced at his companion and smiled.

The face, white from the time they left the bank, showed no signs of returning consciousness, but remained as ghastly as before.

The cashier touched the woman on the shoulder, at which she started up with a light cry.

Winnie Shanks looked first at the cashier, and then at his captive.

She bounded from the chair with a cry that seemed to echo through the entire house, and the next moment she was standing in the middle of the room, the very picture of terror.

"Where did you find that man?" she demanded. "In the name of Heaven, where did you pick him up? I daggered him at my house only a few hours ago. I dragged him through the hall and threw him down the cellar, but he is here!"

She was almost delirious with excitement, and, trembling in every nerve, she covered the man, Gideon Glare, with her hand, and repeated her questions.

"Make sure of it," warned Cadmus. "This man showed no signs of having been daggered when I encountered him."

"But I did it. I struck him with all my might, and I aimed at his heart, too."

"In your own house?"

"Yes. He came to me with a threat and a demand, and I would not listen to either."

"You know him?"

"I know what he called himself—Gideon Glare. He said he wanted his brother."

"He made the same demand of me. But, you see I overcame him with the power, and he is as a lamb in our hands."

Winnie crept closer to Cadmus Cook, and laid her hand on his arm, while she looked him in the eye, half-savagely.

"Let him escape, and the jig is up. You know that, Cadmus. Kill him here, and then, after we have settled the detective, we will be safe. Sealed lips keep secrets. Silent tongues never betray."

"Very well, there he is."

For the first time since quitting the bank the hand of the cashier fell away from his victim's wrist.

As he did so he stepped back and left Gideon Glare standing in the middle of the room, waiting for the stroke.

"I might fail. I failed before," said Witch Winnie. "Take him, Cadmus."

There was no reply, no movement on the cashier's part.

"Why not wait a little while? There need be no hurry about this matter," he assumed.

"What? Do you want to imperil final success by giving this enemy a breathing spell? Where is your courage? Remember the oath! You must know that we are still in the woods, though we hold all the cards in our hands. Would you make the slip which dashes the cup from our lips? Cadmus, my brother, we must stand or fall together!"

These impassioned words seemed to rouse the cashier.

He took a step toward Gideon Glare, who watched him and remained as motionless as a post where he stood, like a sheep waiting for the axe of the executioner.

"I cannot," he cried, drawing back with

a shudder. "He is too much like the other."

"He is the image of the other, and that makes him dangerous," almost shrieked Winnie.

There was no reply.

"Quick! He may come out of the spell! He may become a tiger in a minute—a tiger whom both of us cannot subdue."

There was much in this, as was shown by the sudden start which the cashier made.

Winnie thrust a revolver forward, but Cadmus spurned it.

"This, then. You may succeed where I failed with the same blade. Now, now, or all is lost!"

Cadmus gripped the dagger hilt and sprang toward the man.

He looked into the dark face, caught sight of returning life in the eyes, and saw a convulsive movement sweep over Gideon's frame.

The man had broken the spell! He was no longer the slave of the mesmerist!

The dagger dropped from the hand of Cadmus Cook and buried its point in the floor.

Winnie Shanks uttered a cry, and sprang to pick it up.

"Now, now! I say, or we are lost! The tiger has come back to life! Cadmus, my brother, strike, and free us from his snares!"

The cashier seemed to catch at last the spirit that animated the woman; but, as he clutched the dagger again, the ex-convict turned, and, throwing open the door, shot into the hall.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE OLD REFRAIN.

The next morning Mrs. Shanks received a message which, for a moment, brought a flush of color to her cheeks.

It came from the hospital, and announced that Carmen, her maid, was dead.

The poor girl who had been her companion in the abduction of her husband, the banker, had taken her own life, and in the hospital ward had breathed her last.

Winnie Shanks smiled. She had sent orders to the hospital that Carmen should be buried from that institution, but at her expense; then she dressed and went downtown.

Whatever had happened after Gideon Glare's spring into the hall, as we have seen, Cadmus Cook was at his post in the bank.

Winnie Shanks entered the bank as usual, and passed into the little office.

It was not long before the cashier followed her, and the curtained door was shut.

They were face to face in the place where Cadmus and Gideon Glare had confronted each other the previous night, but the dark-faced man was not there then.

The hour was ten, and the clerks were busy with the morning's work.

"I have written this," said Winnie Shanks, taking from her purse a letter which she handed to the cashier, who read as follows:

"Mr. Tracy Trailer—Will you call at my house on important business connected with the late burglary of the Goldstone Bank? I would be pleased to see you there at any time between the hours of six and ten P. M. to-day. Respectfully,
"MRS. WINNIE SHANKS."

Cadmus Cook must have read the letter twice before he looked up into the silent, watchful face of the conscienceless woman before him.

"Do you think it best?" he asked, at last.

"Why not? Isn't it better to call him to you for a purpose than have him find out all on the street?"

"I don't know."

"I shall send this letter, and if you don't care to help me I will help myself."

She spoke in determined tones, and her face was very white.

"I am going from here to Vilola's."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"There it is again. Afraid? Why did I embark in this game?—to be afraid of my shadow? No!"

Ten minutes later Winnie Shanks came out of the private office, and, after recognizing several of the clerks, passed on to the street.

Vilola, the bird-woman, uttered a sharp cry when she saw the woman enter her shop and raise her veil.

"You must take him away," said Mother Centipede. "I have been in a stew ever since last night."

They had passed to the little room upstairs, and the face of the bird-seller was pressed close to Winnie's.

"He is with you yet, isn't he?"

"Yes; but I do not know how long he will be here."

Then she told the story about the letter which Sergius Shanks had written, how she had been robbed of it by Tom Mattoon, and how, in return, she had robbed the robber, knocking him senseless with a bird-cage and leaving him in that condition in her cellar.

But, Mother Centipede hastened to inform Winnie that the man was not there now; that he had come back to life and had effected his escape in some manner, which caused Winnie to recall her attack on Gideon Glare in her own home.

"Won't you see him and pacify him? I shall have the police down upon me in a jiffy if that man tells them. Pitti, for the sake of your old friend—your godmother—"

"Hush!" broke in Mrs. Shanks, growing suddenly white. "I am not Pitti. Remember that!"

"But you used to be when we made the rubies, you know."

Mother Centipede had lowered her voice, but Winnie held up a warning hand.

"Some one may be listening. The very walls have ears sometimes, so, for Heaven's sake, keep your tongue still about the past."

"But go down and see him. Tell him that I delivered the letter to the detective and that he will be here to-day."

Winnie Shanks rose, but when she had taken a few steps toward the door at the end of the room she stopped and looked at Vilola.

"Do you know anything about the man who came upon you and carried off the letter?"

"Don't I know him? He's been behind the bars! But, then, he's not the only one who has been there."

"But why should he take such an interest against you and me, Vilola?"

"Don't you remember, Pitti, the little chap who used to stand on the corner long ago and make faces at you when you came and went along this street?"

"Don't I? He used to say—Heavens! what was it he used to sing on the corner whenever I went past?"

"I know. You told me once, and I ran him off. It was something like this:

"You're pretty, my bird, but, Oh, some day You'll sing behind the bars."

"That's it!" cried Mrs. Shanks. "I wonder that you remember it after so long a time."

"Tell him that the detective will come to-day. Tell him anything that will pacify him," the bird-woman whispered.

"I'll quiet him, and he sha'n't bother you very much longer, Vilola."

"Thank Heaven, for I haven't slept an hour at a stretch since you fetched him down."

The banker's wife gathered up her skirts and opened the door, disclosing a flight of steps, down which she stepped.

It was a short flight, and at the bottom was another door, which she opened.

Mother Centipede, seeing her visitor thus far, went back to her birds.

In another moment there came from below a cry which caused the bird-seller to run from behind her counter and pause a second in the semi-darkness that filled the place at all hours.

"Mercy! What has happened?" cried the old woman, as she flew to the open door, and presently she was going down the steep steps at the risk of breaking her neck. "What is it, Pitti, child?"

No reply, and she bounded on, passing through the door at the bottom, her heart in her throat with apprehension.

Winnie Shanks stood alone in the room which she had invaded.

She neither moved nor spoke.

"Pitti! Pitti! What has happened? Where is he?" she demanded.

Ah, that was it! Where was Sergius Shanks?

The bird-seller stooped where she had last seen the banker.

The couch was empty. A newspaper lay on the table near the bed.

"He is gone, don't you see?" exclaimed Winnie, finding her voice at last. "You have let him out."

"Not so; I knew it not," she solemnly asserted. "He must have escaped when Mattoon got away. You can't believe that I would betray my little Pitti?"

Mrs. Shanks pushed the woman off and glared at her with the ferocity of a leopard.

"He paid you to let him out," she cried. "Didn't he offer you a thousand dollars to deliver the letter to the ferret?"

"But I was true to you through all that," persisted Mother Centipede.

"I have only your word for it."

"Isn't it as good as your word?" hissed Mother Centipede, her flushed face nearly touching the one which confronted her.

"There was a time when you used to cheat customers in this very place, and when you used to sell the bogus rubies. Ah, when did you become so nice that Mother Centipede's word is not as good as yours? Me let him out?"

"Don't!" exclaimed the desperate woman, pushing back the hand which was thrust forward. "I am in a state of terror. I must find him before—"

"Before he goes back to the bank and makes a scene? Yes, yes. Go up, up, quick! He may have gone home. When were you there last? He has been talking much to himself, and I heard him laugh once or twice like people who are out of their minds."

Winnie Shanks turned toward the stairs and bounded up the dark steps.

"Tell me—send me word if you find him," called Mother Centipede after her. "I shall be here."

It is doubtful if the woman heard these words, for she was already out of sight, hurrying from the den which had become desperately hot to her.

"Escaped? Heavens! This will never do. I need all my nerve now. I must become Pitti, and have her courage and her coolness. The dice must be thrown again, and then—then—"

She did not finish the sentence, but hurried on and on, after passing into the street.

She did not seem to note what was passing around her.

Crossing at the first place, she sought the shady side of the thoroughfare.

As she went on her face got a better color, for she had recovered somewhat from her fright and could think intelligently.

"I'll fix it all right. I'll find him and play a winning hand, after all; but, what a fright I have had! When I found that little place empty it went through me like a knife, and when Mother Centipede recalled that boy's song I felt faint."

She was nearing home.

At the next corner she would take a car, having recovered enough for this; then she would send the letter to the detective.

The decoy letter!

Winnie was cool now, but all at once she was seized by the wrist, and, as she turned her head, she heard a voice at her ear:

"You're pretty, my bird, but, Oh, some day You'll sing behind the bars!"

The banker's wife thought she would sink through the sidewalk, but when she looked the singer was gone!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BANKER'S STORY.

If instead of proceeding homeward, Mrs. Winnie Shanks could have passed to another part of the city not very far from the spot where she had encountered the man who had whispered—almost sang—the lines to her, she would have turned a shade paler at the sight.

She would have had no need to go home, looking for her husband there, for she would have found him seated near Detective Traller, into whose ears he was telling the story of his own dread secret.

Tom Mattoon, while robbed in turn of the letter which he had snatched from Mother Centipede, had gone to the man of many trails with the information that a sealed message had been handed to the bird-seller for delivery to him, and the ferret suspected at once that some one was imprisoned in the secret room beneath the cages.

It was the ferret and not Tom Mattoon who had set the captive free, and now with his face turned toward the old man, in the chair in his own little place, he was listening to the narrative and putting a terrible chain, link by link, together.

Sergius Shanks began at the beginning.

He told the ferret of New York how he had made his thousands in Wall Street, how he had lost his first wife and how he had been ensnared by the witchful beauty and wiles of Winnie, his present wife.

"She was introduced to me first by my present cashier, Mr. Cadmus Cook," explained the old banker. "I believe he said they were old acquaintances, but I cannot say.

"I only know that Mr. Cook, who said that he had my happiness at heart, desired that I should meet Miss Nathan—that was her name then, and I met her accordingly. Not long after the marriage I became suspicious that I had been grossly deceived.

"One day while driving through the city I saw my wife come out of a bird store in Canal Street, and in the door she stopped and talked confidentially to the woman in charge—my late jaileress, Mother Centipede. My wife was slightly disguised, but I knew her on sight. I kept the secret of my discovery to myself, for I was willing not to believe that the woman had deceived me.

"From that day I had no peace of mind. My wife was watched. I discovered that she went frequently to the bird-seller's, and then I began to hunt up the history of Mother Centipede. It was not very savory. The woman, I discovered, was a fence for crooks, as well as a dealer in song birds, and by and by it came out that she once had in her employ a little girl called Pitti."

Sergius Shanks stopped here and was loth to proceed.

"For a long time" he went on, "I did not want to believe that this Pitti had grown up and blossomed into Miss Nathan whom I had married. But I had to believe it. Evidence which I dared not overlook accumulated until I was overwhelmed.

"Then it was that I prepared these papers which were stolen from the little steel safe. They contained a history of what I had discovered, and were intended to remain there till after my death. More than that, there was deposited with those same documents one which was of more importance than all. This was secured with a red tape and sealed with my own seal.

"The world believes that I had no offspring by my first wife, but the world has been deceived," continued the banker. "A child came of that marriage, which was not a very happy one, owing to my own disposition. The little girl, soon after birth, was carried off one night from the nursery at my own connivance, and was taken to a person who agreed to raise her to womanhood.

"My wife grieved much after the little one, but at last became reconciled, and, too proud to ask me to restore her—for to the last she believed that I knew all about the child's going off—she died without ever again clasping her to her bosom. What became of the daughter? That is something I have never been able to fully decide. The person to whom I gave the child died, and when I went to find the little one she had vanished."

"But you know to whom you entrusted the child?" intimated the detective.

"Yes. I kept a record of it at the time. The man turned out bad, went 'up the

river,' and died there, while the woman, his wife, died soon afterward."

"The name?"

"It was Glare."

"What was the man's first name?"

"Gideon, I think, but I am not so sure about that. You see, the story of my child's birth, and of her abduction with my consent, was told in the document sealed and bound as I have mentioned, and deposited in the safe. All those documents vanished the night of the robbery, and when I saw the open drawer and the severed finger in your possession, I realized what they would be worth in the hands of an enemy. The shock nearly overcame me."

Sergius Shanks turned toward the window and for a moment looked longingly out.

"This Pitti," he went on at last, "had a brother or a half-brother—I never could find out just which. There is no doubt of this in my mind, but that was one of the links which I could never pick up against my wife's past."

"He was her half-brother," informed the detective.

"Ah, you know then? You can supply that link?"

"Fortunately, I can," was the reply. "He used to come to Mother Centipede's shop, and now and then Pitti, who had a splendid voice, would sing like the birds."

"That is true. While I was cooped up in the large room underneath Mother Centipede's shop I accidentally discovered some names scrawled on one of the walls and at last I made them out."

"Whose names were they?"

"They were the words 'Pitti' and 'Carlo.'"

A smile came to the face of the New York spotter and he seemed to lean toward the banker.

"Your wife's name and her half-brother's," he explained.

"It must be so, looking at this affair in the light that has come to me," was admitted. "But what a game she has played. How she has roped me in—yes, that's the proper term—and how I have been blinded by my own folly."

Sergius Shanks rose and began to pace the room.

"Go to the end of the trail, as you have run it down, Tracy Traller," he urged, looking at the detective, without pausing in his tramp. "I turn her over to you."

"And her brother, Carlo?"

"Yes, if you can find him."

"You do not suspect who he is?"

"I never got quite that far," was the response. "There are some things which are still in the dark. I sometimes fear that my mind is giving way under the strain; but I hope not. I want to live for vengeance—and pardon."

He stopped suddenly in his walk and then came up to the silent detective.

"The papers are in the hands of the enemy," said he, bending forward. "That enemy knows that I have an heir—that my child, if living, would inherit much of my wealth. I'll give her all of it. If the dead could speak—if the man who opened the safe and robbed the little drawer—could come back to earth and tell the truth we might get at the real guilty."

"You know who locked the safe that night, Mr. Shanks?"

"Yes, yes; Stafford did that; but Stafford never connived with the burglar."

"You seem to be sure of that."

"I am sure. Stafford is the pink of honor."

"What about Cadmus Cook?"

Sergius Shanks took a long breath before he replied:

"I cannot forget that through him I met my present wife," said he at last. "That comes up before me whenever I recall the cashier of the Goldstone Bank. I won't say that he had a hand in the robbery—I can't say that; but I can't forget that introduction and how he led up to it."

The detective drew from his pocket a little packet, which he opened.

Sergius Shanks was watching him like a hawk.

When the paper had been unwrapped

something fell upon the table, and at sight of it the aged banker started.

"What means that button, Mr. Traller?" he demanded.

Traller picked it up and handed it to his companion.

"Did you ever see a cuff-button like that, Mr. Shanks?"

The banker took the trifle and held it between finger and thumb.

"I recall another like it. I have seen it many a time at the bank. Mr. Cook, the cashier, used to wear buttons of this design."

"And no one else to your knowledge?"

"I never saw one like it on another's cuff."

"When did you see it last on Mr. Cook's cuff?"

"I cannot recall the exact time, but it was before the robbery."

"Very well. Let us say before the burglary of the safe. This button was found in Mr. Stafford's room the morning after that episode."

There was a sudden start on the banker's part and his gaze fell again to the silent button.

"In—Mr. Stafford's—room?" he repeated. Then he looked up.

"Mr. Stafford had the combination for the night. I went down to the bank that same night, but I found the safe closed. I told you, you will remember, the morning of the discovery, that I saw the papers that night in the safe; but that was not true. In my eagerness to impress upon you all that they were taken I made up that little story."

"As you say, Mr. Shanks, the combination belonged to Mr. Stafford, the teller, according to the usages of the Goldstone. He must have been robbed of that secret during the night. And, as I have said, this cuff-button was found in his room."

Sergius Shanks stared at the trinket, but his lips did not move.

"Your cashier is a mesmerist," said the ferret.

"I have heard of that."

"Do you think any other person would wear his cuff-buttons?"

"I see—I see!" exclaimed the old man, rising and seeming to gasp for breath. "Out there are the guilty, Mr. Traller. Go and close in on them."

"On them?"

"Yes—on my wife—God pity her—and Cadmus Cook."

Traller said nothing for a moment.

"But there was a more serious crime committed that night—one darker than robbery."

"What! the murder of the man with the missing finger?"

The detective nodded.

"Do you think?—No, I dare not ask you," cried Sergius Shanks.

He buried his face in his hands, and for half a minute rocked his body back and forth.

"Go out and do your duty," said he, at last. "The trail belongs to you, Tracy Traller. I employed you to unravel this mystery of the bloody finger. Pull your net ashore, no matter what sort of fish you catch!"

"I will do that. The fish are entangled in the meshes now."

Once more the aged banker bowed his head and covered his face with his hands.

"If I could find my child—if I could look once more into the face of little Myra—she must be a young woman now, if living—I could go."

The detective looked down at the old man, but said nothing. He seemed to pity from the depths of his heart the victim of the foul plot, and telling him that he would see him later, he stole from the house out into the broad sunlight of the day of doom.

The ferret walked rapidly from the neighborhood and turned up in Wall Street.

In another moment he had entered the Goldstone Bank, and was at the cashier's window.

Cadmus Cook came forward, barely looking at the man there.

But, the next instant, the cashier started and uttered a short cry, for he had seen the name on the check before him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE UNFAILING HAND.

It was probably the strangest check ever offered at any bank.

It was singularly written and strangely worded, and no wonder it startled the cashier of the Goldstone Bank.

This is how the check read:

"Pay to the order of Eternal Justice that which is her due. "BUCK GLARE."
"Indorsed by 'Carlo' and 'Pitti.'"

Cook looked up with a face which had suddenly lost its color, and the eyes that met his were filled with triumph.

He had seen those eyes before; he had felt their light penetrating the darkest recesses of his soul, but now they seemed to shine with victorious light.

The man outside the railing came round and entered the sacred precincts of the bank.

Cadmus Cook had not moved, and the check which had startled him still lay on the veined marble.

He knew the man before him—knew that the detective's moment had come, and that he was one of the fishes in the drag-net.

For a moment he remained motionless before the ferret; then he walked toward the private office. The door stood slightly ajar, and, as he opened it, the detective caught sight of a gown.

The door was instantly closed, but the foot of the ferret was there, and his hand turned the knob before the cashier could turn the key.

Winnie Shanks arose and greeted the man of many trails with a sharp exclamation.

Trailer motioned the pair to chairs while he put his back to the door and faced them.

"The papers," said he, coolly. "Produce them!"

The couple looked toward the steel safe and remained silent.

"You have them if you have not destroyed them," he went on. "The chain is complete. You, Cadmus Cook, are 'Carlo,' and you, Mrs. Shanks, are the old-time 'Pitti,' of the Canal Street crib. The birds sang for both of you years ago when you were half-brother and sister, just as they sing for Mother Centipede to-day. Sergius Shanks has made a full confession. I know that his child, whose birth he revealed in one of the documents stolen from the safe, was raised in the family of a confessed felon. You may not have discovered that, Cadmus, but it is true, nevertheless. She was taken charge of by the Glares, and—"

There was an interruption, and the cashier lost color.

"You told Nina that, Cadmus," said Winnie.

"I did, but I never suspected that she was his child."

The detective took the pair away with him.

"What are you waiting here for?" asked Cadmus Cook, as the carriage which had conveyed them from the bank stopped in a certain street and the driver rested on his seat.

"You shall see in a moment."

Presently there came out of a house a tall, dark-faced man, who carried a bundle of humanity in his arms. He approached the vehicle.

Winnie gazed at the man, while Cadmus looked more particularly at the little one whom he carried.

Gideon Glare approached the carriage, and the detective lowered the window.

"Bring her close, Gideon!" he ordered.

"Oh, is it you, Trailer?" piped a little voice, as the face of Nipsie Atom was revealed. "I was wondering what Gideon was carrying me off for."

"Look at the child, Cadmus Cook!" commanded the ferret. "Look her fairly in the face."

The man did so, but reluctantly. Nipsie regarded him for a moment.

"That does not look like the man who carried me off, Trailer," said the little one. "But I have seen this face before."

"I want you to tell me where, Nipsie."

"I saw it at the window of Castle Norway, in the room across the alley from my room."

"When, Nipsie?"

"That Saturday night, you know—the night the bank in Wall Street was robbed."

The ashen lips of Cook, the crook, twitched, and he averted his eyes.

"Be sure of it, Nipsie," the detective warned.

"Oh, I am quite sure, Trailer. Didn't I tell you how I saw two men struggling in that room by the curtain pantomime, and that when I afterward saw the face at the window it was a face just like that man's?"

"Take her back, Gideon!"

As the dark-faced man started to carry out the detective's command he looked into Mrs. Shanks' face.

The woman recoiled into the darkest corner of the carriage, but he suddenly covered her with his finger.

"You struck a little too high that time, Winnie," said he. "Your needle-pointed dagger struck a bit of zinc, a talisman, over my heart. The next time, if you ever get a chance, you won't fail, eh?"

The carriage moved on again, and soon the Superintendent of Police knew that Detective Trailer's drag-net had been pulled in with its precious contents.

There came a time, and it was but the next day, when the charges against Harley Stafford were dismissed, and when he was invited to take his old place in the bank again.

For Sergius Shanks was there, as of yore, but with a paler face, and eyes that seemed to have receded deeper than ever into his head.

Cadmus Cook, in prison, charged with murder, leaned against the cold bars of the little cell that hemmed him in, and, with folded arms, looked out upon the cheerless walls beyond.

The banker's wife, arrested for conspiracy, shared a better cell, though she did not deserve it, and at last, with woman's frightened heart, she turned against the man with whom she had plotted.

She shamelessly told that she was the Pitti of Mother Centipede's crib—that she had, years before, been the go-between of the ruby-makers and the gem fences—that Cadmus Cook, alias "Carlo," was her half-brother—that they had plotted for Sergius Shanks' wealth, first by her marriage with him, and then by robbery, by which they expected to get at a secret of his life, and afterward use it as a club to open his purse to its fullest extent.

Nor was this all, heartless as was the confession. It went even further than that, and what the woman failed to tell Detective Trailer supplied.

Cadmus Cook blanched at sight of the cuff-button, and confessed that he had gone to Stafford's room, and by his black art had extracted from him the combination of the safe.

This secret he had imparted to Buck Glare, the man whom he had hired for the real work, and whom afterward he murdered in Castle Norway, in order that the secret might be his and Winnie's alone.

Nina, who turned out to be the child of Sergius Shanks beyond all cavil, became the wife of Harley Stafford, while little Nipsie Atom moved into better quarters and had more birds than she knew what to do with.

Gideon Glare had the wolfish satisfaction of seeing justice deal with the murderer of the twin brother—crook though he was—and Tom Mattoon, after Winnie had received her sentence for conspiracy and complicity—for Sergius Shanks had no mercy on Mother Centipede's protégée—said that the old song had been fulfilled, and walked away whistling:

"You're pretty, my bird, but, Oh, some day
You'll sing behind the bars!"

Gradually Sergius Shanks recovered his spirits, which, in a great measure, was due to Nina and the little ones who came to cheer his home, but he could never wholly forget the guilty woman and her half-

brother, nor cease to recall his experience in Mother Centipede's trap, fence and crib.

As for that delectable Amazon herself, she soon moved from the vicinity of her many questionable deeds, and all the birds, which had served as a blind for her true calling, were one day found on the floor of her store with their necks wrung, undoubtedly by her fat hands.

No one cared whither she went, and it was a long time before any person cared to inquire after her.

Then it was discovered that she was living in a Southern city, watched by the police and regretting that one source of her old revenue—money from Pitti—had been shut off by Trailer, the Dare-Devil Detective.

Time came when a woman died in prison, and a paragraph of a few lines recalled to New Yorkers the fact that Winnie Shanks, the banker's wife, had ended her remarkable career.

To this day Sergius Shanks does not know that she is dead, for Nina has asked that the news be kept from him and he thinks of her as serving out a sentence which she so fully deserved.

What has become of Gideon Glare and Tom Mattoon I know not. If the wary detective knows he tells no one, keeping to himself the whereabouts of the two jailbirds who helped him unravel the Mystery of the Missing Finger, and who may yet command his further attention.

THE END.

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- 512 Captain Velvet's Big Stake.
- 505 Phil Fox, the Gentle Spotter.
- 496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
- 487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
- 480 Hawkspear, the Man with a Secret.
- 478 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
- 460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
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